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THE WORKS OF

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

VOLUME TWELVE

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THE QUARTETTE

THE MUMMY'S FOOT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

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He kissed the icy hand that had held the sceptre of the world . . . . . *Frontispiece*

She fitted it very skilfully to her leg . . *Page* 338

Introduction

THE QUARTETTE

Introduction

IT is probably impossible for the present generation of Europeans, and certainly for Americans, to understand the passionate devotion felt by Frenchmen, towards the latter part of the first half of the nineteenth century for the great Napoleon. While it is true that millions of the French had breathed easier when he fell at Waterloo, and the end of the long years of war that had sent the best, the flower, of French youth to fall on foreign and home battle-fields had come, there occurred before long a tremendous reaction in favour of the Emperor. Several causes contributed to this: in the first place, the victory of Waterloo brought in its train invasion and armed occupancy of the territory; then the Bourbons, restored by foreign arms, exhibited the most absolute unintelligence of the changed conditions of the country and of society; further, the exile of the fallen Emperor to Saint Helena, while

quite justified by considerations of policy and humanity, aroused the deepest irritation in every French breast that still conserved the feeling of national pride and devotion to the man who had so long incarnated the military glory of a people ever fond of war and signally victorious on so many different fields and in so many diverse countries. These feelings became all the stronger as time passed and the recollections of the fearful sufferings that Napoleon had caused passed away, as all such recollections will pass. There then sprang up a Napoleonic legend, to which poets, historians, dramatists, painters, singers, politicians all contributed in turns or together. Napoleon became the incarnation of triumphant France, and men recalled with swelling breasts that under him the nation had dictated terms of peace to the sovereigns of Europe in the capital of each of them. The glorious epic of so many years' duration excited and inflamed all imaginations, and the genuineness of the sufferings of the illustrious captive lent an additional glamour to the memory of him that was so sedulously cultivated. Béranger's songs were on all lips; Hugo, who, in his first poems, had heaped obloquy upon "the tyrant," changed his views and ere long became

an almost fanatical worshipper of the great warrior. The tide set more and more strongly in favour of the lost leader, and the French were ready to acclaim again any one bearing the name of Napoleon, — a name that was indeed one to conjure with, as was shortly afterwards proved.

When Louis-Philippe obtained leave to bring back to France the ashes of the dead Emperor, and sent the Prince de Joinville with a frigate to Saint Helena, the whole of France was in an indescribable state of ferment and excitement. The translation of the remains from the lone islet in the Atlantic to the superb resting-place prepared for them under the Dome of the Invalides on the Champ de Mars, was the signal for an outburst of patriotic and military fervour that has perhaps never been equalled, and certainly never surpassed in France. It was on this occasion that Victor Hugo wrote his magnificent "The Return of the Emperor," three stanzas from which may here be quoted, as expressing the very thoughts that led Gautier to the selection of the theme he has developed in "The Quartette," and which will, therefore make the meaning of the tale plainer to the modern reader: —

"Saint Helena! — O lesson! O fall! Warning! Agony!
England, her hate to satisfy her whole genius using,
In open day the great man 'gan to devour;
And once again men beheld the Homeric sight:
The fetters, the rock burned by scorching Afric sun,
The Titan, — and the vulture!

"But now these tortures, that mighty sorrow,
The Punic rage, the rancour implacable
That made the Great Crucified bleed,
Th' affronts that smote every soul of pride,
Like deep vase wherein pours a fountain's stream,
Slowly the whole world with pity filled.

"Pity from noble hearts springing! Cry of the wide world!
These angered thee in thy shadow, thou British gaoler!
For admiration, with its sov'ran flame,
Hardens vile man and softens great souls.
Alas! when weeps the brave, the coward laughs; for fire
The mud doth dry, but melteth bronze."

Gautier started to write a sort of historical novel, with just enough history in it to account for the choice of the subject and to interest the French reader; for the tale was intended for home consumption, or at most for perusal by the foes of England, who would willingly enjoy abuse of the country that had saved Europe and whose crowning triumph at Waterloo had not been

altogether palatable even to the enemies of Napoleon. Chauvinism, as the French term it, jingoism, as the modern term is, was as rampant in 1848 as at the present day, and the author who dexterously appealed to it was sure of a large audience and of a ready sale for his works.

But Gautier, while sufficiently chauvinistic in this story to satisfy all but the most exacting fanatics of Napoleonism, introduced a clever variation of the theme in making the attempted rescue of the illustrious captive the work of Englishmen instead of Frenchmen. By doing this, he laid heavier condemnation upon England herself, since he showed, to the satisfaction of the readers of *la Presse*, at least, that even in perfidious Albion there were men as devoted admirers of the Little Corporal as any that could be found within the confines of fair France. This clever artifice, for it is scarcely more, enabled Gautier to indulge safely in the most extraordinary representation of English life and manners, which no one can read at the present day without a smile. But his object was, not to represent the manners and customs of a land he knew but slightly, — for his trips to London had not been devoted to a serious observation of the

people, — it was to write a dramatically interesting story that should move deeply the public to which it was addressed; a public that devoured it greedily, since it flattered its vanity, and justified its admiration for Napoleon and its hatred for Sir Hudson Lowe.

Neither probability, therefore, nor an accurate picture of English life and ways is to be looked for in this story, which is more in the style of Balzac's famous "History of the Thirteen" than in that of the modern historical novel. Most probably Gautier was inspired both by that celebrated work and by his own recollections of the Society of the Red Horse, of which he has given an account in his study on Balzac, and of which he was himself a member. Indeed, his description of the junta to which de Volmerange, Arundel, Daksha, and the other prominent characters belonged, recalls at once both the formidable association of which Ferragus was the head, and the less redoubtable Red Horse. The adventures of the personages, the breaking of the matches at the very church door and in the nuptial chamber, the mysterious brig, the underground passage to the Thames, the Indian mutiny, the conspiracy for the liberation of Napoleon and the setting of the Emperor on the

throne of India, recall constantly the somewhat grandiloquent schemes that Balzac is fond of ascribing to the men he sets moving in his vast "Comédie humaine."

But if the reader is willing to take things for granted, and to allow Gautier to have his own way, he is sure to enjoy the extraordinary adventures and the astounding complications which the author has evolved for his entertainment. In other words, the book is not to be taken seriously as an attempt to produce a true historical novel, but merely as a brilliant emanation of the author's imagination.

"The Quartette" appeared in the columns of *la Presse*, from September 20 to October 15, 1848, the very year in which Louis-Philippe was being driven from the throne, to be succeeded by Louis Napoleon, first as President of the French Republic, and then as Emperor of the French. It was published in book form in 1851.

The Quartette

THE QUARTETTE

I

THE pale November dawn, not yet very wide-awake, was rubbing its eyes behind a curtain of gray clouds, and already the worthy innkeeper Geordie was standing at the door of his hostel, his arms crossed as far as he could over a vast paunch that testified most eloquently to the excellence of the cookery at the Red Lion. He had the perfectly satisfied air of an innkeeper who, being the only one in the place, feels that he is master of the situation and is not afraid that travellers will escape him; for at that time the Red Lion was the only inn in Folkestone.

At the time of the story we are about to relate, Folkestone was a little village, the yellow brick and timbered houses of which rose irregularly on the slope that leads from the summit of the cliff to the sea. Geordie's house was one of the handsomest, if not the handsomest, in the place. At the corner of the build-

ing, at the end of an elegantly twisted iron volute, swung in the sea-breeze a red lion of tin, the paint on which, owing to the salt mists of the ocean, had to be frequently renewed. This having been recently done, the sign glowed as brightly as a lion gules on a field or in a manual of heraldry.

Geordie was thinking, but his thoughts were in no wise poetical. He was calculating in his own mind the profits of the preceding months. Geordie reasoned that if the increase kept up, he might in a short time purchase the piece of ground which he coveted and which cut so unpleasantly into his own land.

He had just got to this point, when a grim-looking individual who had been standing before him for a few moments past and whom he had not observed, owing to his preoccupation, apparently thinking that there was no other way of being noticed, slapped him on the stomach in the way that thin, bony men like to do to stout men, either through irony or facetiousness.

Angered by this familiarity in very bad taste, which was peculiarly disagreeable to him and which he scarcely put up with from his intimate friends and his rich customers, Geordie sprang backwards with remarkable agility for a man of his size, and seeing that his

aggressor was dressed in a way that did not betoken wealth, he mentally reasoned thus: "This fellow will at most eat a slice of beef and drink a pint of half-and-half and a glass of whiskey, and yet he is as insolent as a nobleman who has for supper a fine pullet washed down with claret and champagne. I do not risk losing more than a shilling and a few pence by speaking plainly to him."

"Well, you brute, you fool, you ass, you ill-bred dolt!" cried Geordie, after the mental reasoning which I have just transcribed. "Is that the way to enter into conversation with well-bred people? I am sorry for those who brought you up."

"Don't get excited, my stout friend. Could I go on standing before you, stuck like a post, until the Day of Judgment? I coughed three times and twice called you by your name, Master Geordie; yet you moved no more than a hogshead. I had to make you feel my presence," answered in a sarcastic tone free from fear and repentance the individual who had just slapped the Falstaff-like paunch of the worthy innkeeper.

"You might have drawn attention to yourself in a more delicate way," returned Master Geordie, in a still

indignant tone, to which, however, the firm speech and assured glance of the stranger had already imparted a more timid inflection.

"Come, you hospitable elephant, clear your own door if I am to pass and enter the coffee-room of the Red Lion inn, the best one in Folkestone."

Master Geordie, who was well acquainted with humankind and with the pitiful look which the consciousness of an empty purse brings to a face, judged from the coolness of the stranger and the freedom of his manners that, notwithstanding his modest dress, he was probably fairly well off and would call for a bottle of French wine, or at least a cup of Canary sack; so, temporarily sacrificing his dignity, he drew back as well as he could and allowed his aggressor to enter the house.

The coffee-room of the Red Lion, lighted by four windows, the sashes of which hung on counterweights, and which have been called guillotines since the invention of that philanthropic instrument, was divided into several wooden boxes not unlike private rooms and recalling the shape and arrangement of loose boxes in stables: for an Englishman is so fond of being alone that he feels uncomfortable in the sight of his kind,

and has to establish a separation, a sort of home for himself, even on the neutral ground of the common room in a tavern. Between the two rows of boxes ran a passage powdered with fine yellow sand, leading to a splendid mahogany counter inlaid with brass ornaments, on which shone rows of pewters and jugs with polished metal covers that gleamed like silver. Behind the counter was a narrow mirror in a wooden frame, and within reach of the hostess's hand a number of faucets at the end of pipes that led into as many barrels of ale and other liquids in the cellar. A few engravings of Hogarth's framed in black, and depicting the disadvantages of some vice or another, — not that of drunkenness, — completed the decoration of this part of the room, which was, as it were, the altar and sanctuary of the house.

Geordie went up to the counter, followed by his guest, who did not appear dazzled by the splendour of the place, and put to him, in a tone which the habit of flattering clients seemed to make more markedly obsequious than he intended, the usual question, "What will your honour take?"

"A post-chaise and four," answered the man, in the quietest, most careless way possible.

At this unexpected reply the owner of the Red Lion assumed a supremely disdainful attitude. He drew himself up, threw back his head and said: —

"Sir, I do not like practical jokes any more than practical jokers. You have already slapped me in a way that I do not care to characterise beyond saying that 'familiar' and 'indecent' do not seem to me too strong. Notwithstanding this discourteous action of yours, I have allowed you to enter this inn of the Red Lion, known, I venture to say, the world over; I have brought you to this counter where are sold refreshing, tonic, or spirituous drinks, as people may prefer; I ask you politely what your honour will take, and you answer nonsense. 'A post-chaise and four' is a reply which in no wise fits in with my question, and shows a formal intention on your part to insult me."

"Not so fast, Master Geordie. You talk too much. Do not get so heated. Just now you were merely crimson, now you have become purple, and you will soon turn blue. Be calm. I have never had the least intention of offending so respectable an individual as you appear to be. I am quite serious. As a matter of fact, I need a carriage, — landau, victoria, post-chaise, I don't care what it is, provided it is strong and runs

easily. With the carriage I need horses, and as I like to travel fast, I called for four, and of the best which have eaten oats in your stables. There is nothing very surprising in that."

The logic of this reasoning struck Master Geordie as plausible enough, although the dress and appearance of his customer still inspired him with a mistrust, which the latter no doubt suspected, for he plunged his hand in one of his pockets and drew out a fairly large bag, which he threw into the air. As it fell it gave out a metallic sound which, to the practised ear of Geordie, revealed the perfect harmony of guineas and sovereigns, without any discord of silver or copper money. The innkeeper, who until now had kept on his cap, took it off and twisted it in his hands somewhat shamefacedly, for he was rather troubled by the plain speech he had used to a man with so well-filled a purse; but who could have suspected that a traveller whose dress was of common stuff and vulgar cut was so well off?

"For how many of these round yellow coins do you propose to exchange one of your vehicles?" said the stranger, — whom I shall call Jack or John, for the purpose of my story; for, being an Englishman, he was

bound to be called by one or the other of these names, — as he spread a large number of coins in a semicircle on the table.

"I could sell you cheap the two-seated chaise, but it has a broken wheel and it would take some time to mend it; or the landau, if the rear spring were not broken," said the hotel-keeper, rubbing his nose with his finger, while with the other hand he held his elbow, — an attitude which at all times sculptors and painters have used to express perplexed meditation.

"Why," said Jack, "instead of these horrible, broken-down traps, do you not at once propose to let me have your olive-green double-seated travelling-carriage lined with Lincoln-cloth, and provided with such beautiful silk blinds?"

"My olive-green travelling-carriage, which cost me so much?" cried Geordie, terrified at the proposal. "What are you thinking of?"

"I am thinking of the carriage. The price is but a small matter. If I pay more for it than you did, you will no doubt consent to part with it?" And as he said these words, Jack, with a very lordly look, carelessly let fall by the other pieces a dozen guineas more, so as to almost close the circle of gold.

"He must be a nobleman in disguise," said the innkeeper to himself, as he nodded in acquiescence to the peremptory request of Jack. "No doubt on these terms I would agree to part with it," he continued aloud; "and when does your honour need the carriage?"

"At once. Tell the postilion to dress and have the horses put to as quickly as possible."

"Two minutes to bring out the carriage from the carriage-house, ten minutes to harness the horses and put them to, — that is twelve; three for Little John to put on his jacket, get into his boots and put a new lash to his whip; — that makes fifteen minutes, by which time you will be driving along at the best speed in the world."

"Fifteen minutes and not one more," said Jack, as he drew from his fob a big silver watch, "or for every minute you are late, I shall administer to your precious corporation one of those slaps which put you in such a temper."

In order to avoid this unpleasantness, Master Geordie hurried out and gave the necessary orders. Then he returned, and with his long habit of urging customers to drink, asked Jack whether he would not take some-

thing while the carriage was being got ready. "Would your honour like a glass of sherry, or port, or arrack punch?"

"Nothing at all, Master Geordie. Not that I doubt the excellence of your cellar and your skilfulness as a mixer of drinks."

"Do you happen to belong to a temperance society?" asked the innkeeper, astonished at such sobriety.

"I am not enough of a drunkard for that," answered Jack, laughing, "nor do I need to listen to Father Matthew's sermons, but I promised myself not to drink to-day."

"A papist, no doubt," murmured Geordie to himself, such a promise seeming to him even more imprudent than Jephthah's vow. "Well, I shall drink this glass to your health," added Geordie, very much grieved at the thought that his customer would not pledge him in return.

"I can watch a man drink without breaking my word," said Jack, "and indeed it is the more meritorious on my part, since I resist temptation; your wine looks so good."

"Real liquid ruby, sir, and what a bouquet! Springtime violets have not a more exquisite scent," said the

innkeeper, melting into poetry and putting his glass under Jack's nose.

Jack breathed in the aroma of the wine with a deep inspiration, followed by an expiration that sounded like a sigh. It seemed as though he would give way before a wine the merits of which he appreciated so thoroughly; so Geordie put the neck of the bottle over the edge of the other glass; but Jack was a man of character and firm will. He recovered himself at once and putting before the eyes of the innkeeper his watch, which pointed to fourteen and a half minutes, he outstretched his big hand, the shape of a mutton-ham, with an air of sarcastic threat.

"There are thirty seconds left," cried Geordie, trying to change the convex line of his paunch into a concave line, — a difficult and indeed impossible feat.

The watch was just about to the mark the fifteenth minute, and the pitiless Jack was balancing his hand to give it more swing, while Geordie was defending his corporation by crossing his arms in a more complicated way than chaste Venus, when fortunately the crack of Little John's whip and the sound of the olive-green carriage emerging from the yard put an end to the embarrassing and pathetic situation.

Jack let fall his hand and Geordie drew himself up again. "I said fifteen minutes," he exclaimed with the intoxication of satisfied punctuality.

"Your paunch has had a narrow escape of it," said Jack as he got into the carriage and sat down without the least hesitation upon the cloth cushions of Lincoln-green.

"Which way, sir?" asked the postilion.

"First, out of the village, and then I shall tell you the road you are to take," answered Jack, who no doubt did not care to let Master Geordie and the few idlers who had drawn together to witness the departure of the carriage know the real object of his trip.

After the village had been left behind, Little John, turning round, said to Jack, "Shall I take the London road, sir?"

"No, my lad," replied Jack; "drive along the shore until I tell you to stop."

Little John, somewhat astonished, drove in that direction, without, however, manifesting any surprise, for Master Jack, although facetious at times, had, it must be confessed, a very terrifying aspect. "No doubt," said Little John to himself, "it is a run-away match with some young lady, who, coming from a

house, will pretend to look at the sea and sketch the landscape, and then leap into the carriage. I rather like elopements, for lovers who feel that they have got parents or guardians at their heels generally pay very handsomely. And yet this fellow does not look like a lover."

They drove for some miles along the shore, on which the sea was breaking in regular waves and dragging down the pebbles polished by slow wear. Not far from the highest steep of the cliff which overlooks the ocean, Jack cried, "Stop!" without any apparent reason, for nowhere around could be seen a house, a farm, a manor, or a road.

Jack left the carriage and walked towards the cliff, which he ascended as easily as would a cat, a sailor, or a smuggler, helping himself by the smallest projections, clutching the clumps of fennel and broom which hung here and there from the rough chin of the rock. He soon reached the top, followed by the amazed glance of Little John, who had not supposed it possible to get there without a ladder or ropes.

When Jack reached the top, a man who was lying on his stomach in such a way as not to be seen from below, and who was looking through a telescope

towards the open sea, raised his head and said: "Ah! is that you, Jack? Is the carriage ready?"

"Yes, and with four horses."

"That is right. The vessel is in sight. I can tell it by the red-and-white pennant which is the signal agreed upon between us."

Even with the naked eye might be seen on the horizon, where the Channel opened out into the ocean, a small white sail like a feather fallen from a swan's wing upon the blue water.

"She has to beat to windward just now, but as soon as she can free her sheets, she will fly over the waters like a gull," continued the man lying down, still looking through the telescope. "The wind is southwest, — just what we want, and as good as if we had bought it from a witch."

Stretching himself out by his companion, Jack took the telescope and looked at the vessel, which was gradually drawing nearer, the hull being already visible. As soon as she freed her wind, great spaces of canvas fell from the yards like white clouds.

"Ah, there he is, showing more canvas in one minute than ten Spitalfield weavers could make in a year!" said Jack.

As soon as she felt the wind, the vessel heeled over, gracefully inclining her masts, as if in salute; then her sails shivered two or three times, and answering the helm, she resumed her upright position, while a double fringe of silvery foam flashed past her black sides.

"What a lovely craft!" cried Jack, carried away by enthusiasm. "She must reel off the knots in great fashion."

Apparently the crew of the ship did not share Jack's ideas as to her speed, for the fore-top-gallant sail was set and another jib showed beyond the two already swelling in the breeze.

"Look, Macgill," said Jack, handing the telescope to his companion; "they evidently don't want to lose any of the wind. With all that canvas set, the devil take me if she is not going fifteen knots!"

Impelled by a fresh breeze, the ship came on so rapidly that in a few minutes the telescope was no longer needed to make out the details.

"Why, they are mad! the captain must have drunk a ton of punch!" cried Jack and Macgill, on seeing the lower stunsails set, the ends of the booms dipping in the sea like the wings of a gull.

"If they keep on," said Macgill, "they will lift her from the water and make her fly in the air or turn her keel up. She is a fine brig. Everything hangs on; not a mast is bending, not a rope is giving," he went on admiringly.

"Never did a smuggler chased by a king's ship, never did a merchant vessel laden with gold and cochineal, harried by a corsair, fly at such speed. One would think their lives depended on it, and yet I cannot see another sail on the horizon."

"Captain Peppercull knows his business. If he is pressing his ship, it is because he is in a hurry or well paid. He would not run the risk for nothing of capsizing or of bringing the whole business down about his ears. He is not fond enough of water for that," said Jack, sententiously. "There is a good reason for our having been sent here and my being told to purchase a travelling-carriage from that accursed Geordie."

"Heaven forgive me, Jack! they are setting the sky-scrapers on every mast."

"There is not a sail now in the 'Lovely Jenny's' locker big enough to make a handkerchief out of. Every rag is set."

"Although, thank Heaven, I am not afraid of water,

externally, at least, I prefer at this moment to be on this rock rather than on Captain Peppercull's deck."

Feeling the weight of the increased canvas, the masts bent like bows, the cut-water disappeared almost entirely under the pressure of the wind, and a great shower of foam broke on the bows, like the shavings that rise from the hole of a plane vigorously driven.

"He will carry away his masts by the board," said Macgill, deeply interested.

Nothing gave way, however, and the ship, carried along like a whirlwind, shot up close to the cliff. Stripped in an instant of her sails, she stopped, showing her fine and delicate rigging. A boat left the side of the "Lovely Jenny" and in a few strokes brought to shore a man who appeared a prey to the liveliest impatience.

"Half an hour late!" he murmured as he jumped ashore, looking at his watch. "Where is the carriage?"

Jack, who with Macgill, had come down from the cliff, called the carriage up. When the new-comer was installed in it, Little John repeated his question, "Which way, your honour?"

"To London, and as fast as you can. Three guineas for yourself."

The carriage went off like lightning, the wheels blazing like those of Elijah's car. Alone with Macgill, Jack formulated this ingenious apothegm: —

"There goes a gentleman who is fond of travelling fast. It would have been a great pity if he had been born a tortoise."

II

LITTLE JOHN, carried away beyond all expression by the promise of a three-guinea tip, caused his whip to perform a series of cracks and explosions which resembled a musketry contest between two armies, for he was a virtuoso in this sort of music. The horses, exasperated by the cracking of the fusilade, and also by the lash of the whip, which in its vagabond arabesques caught them on the ears, galloped at full speed and rushed through space with mad ardour. The wheels turned so fast that they seemed to have no spokes; nothing could be seen of them but rapid flashes.

The stranger had ensconced himself in a corner of the carriage with the motionless resignation and the concentrated fury of a powerful will that meets natural and insurmountable obstacles, such as time and space. In the palm of his hand, stretched out on his knee, he held a watch, the hands of which he followed with a restless gaze. Then, glancing out of the window at

the sides of the road, he measured the speed with which the trees vanished past the narrow pane.

"The half-hour lost will soon be made up if the horses can keep up this pace for a little while longer," murmured the mysterious personage, with a sigh of satisfaction.

The man who was in such a hurry to reach London deserves to have his appearance described with a few strokes of the pen. He was young; his features were regular and cold, but marked with the stamp of reflection and of will. He did not appear to be more than twenty-six or twenty-seven years of age. The lower portion of his face, coloured by successive layers of tan, betokened numerous voyages or long sojourns in the East and the warm regions of the tropics, for the dark complexion was not his natural one. The brow, partially uncovered and flecked with short curls of very fine fair hair, had a satiny whiteness, and protected from the heat of the sun by the shade of the hat, it preserved all the brilliancy of Northern blood. Even after this examination, it would have been difficult to assign a particular rank or a distinct social position to the individual sitting on the Lincoln-green cloth cushions of Master Geordie's olive-green travelling-carriage.

Geordie, indeed, would unquestionably have uttered the most doleful lamentations on seeing the pace at which Little John was driving his horses and his favourite carriage.

The man was not a soldier. He had not the stiffness, the carriage of the head, and the square shoulders which make a son of Mars recognisable at a glance, even in civilian dress. Nor was he a clergyman. His face, though serious and thoughtful, had not the beatific expression and the sugary softness characteristic of churchmen. Nor was he a merchant. His white brow was not marked by any wrinkles full of figures and calculations as to the chances of a rise or fall in sugar. Nor was he a dandy. But it might be safely affirmed, on looking at him, that he was a perfect gentleman.

What was the urgent interest which made him gallop along the London road as if the salvation of the world depended on his not being a minute late? Was he running away from or pursuing any one? I cannot yet tell that.

The horses began to show signs of fatigue. The rubbing of the harness made the perspiration break out on them in flakes of white, foamy lather; their breasts

were covered with silvery foam like that of the sea-coursers in the triumphs of Neptune or Galatea. Long jets of smoke issued from their nostrils, and, carried away by the wind, mingled with the silvery vapour that rose from their heaving sides. The carriage rolled in a cloud, like the car of a classic divinity.

In spite of his great desire to earn the three guineas, Little John felt some scruple at driving his animals in this way, and the fear of bringing them back broken-winded to Master Geordie combated for a time his very natural desire to deserve the splendid tip. Then Little John was an Englishman, and his postilion's heart began to bleed as he saw Black, his favourite horse, breathless and covered with sweat. A French postilion would not have felt any such scruples. So, to quiet his own conscience, Little John rose somewhat in his saddle, made a half-turn towards the carriage, and said, resting his hand upon the quarter of the horse he rode: "Is it your lordship's intention to kill the horses and to pay for them?"

"Yes," replied the stranger.

"Very good," answered Little John; "your lordship's desire shall be fulfilled." And settling himself in his boots and his saddle, he struck his horse with

the handle of his whip. The animal reared, and the pain calling out the remains of his strength, he dashed forward, carrying along the remainder of the team. The desperate speed was kept up, thanks to an incessant application of blows, which would have wearied a less practised arm than Little John's.

The stranger's eye was still fixed upon his watch-dial; he paid no attention whatever to the rural landscape softly gilded by autumn, or to the pretty cottages peeping in all the simplicity of their morning dress through the trees, already losing their leaves, along the roadside, and showed himself insensible to all the graceful details of English nature. He assuredly cared very little for picturesqueness, at that time, at least, although he did not appear to belong to the thick-headed class of Philistines and *bourgeois*. He was engrossed by the one thought of reaching his destination.

Thanks to the additional impulse given to the speed of the horses by Little John, henceforth reassured as regarded all possibility of accidents, the eager traveller seemed to breathe more freely, his brow cleared, and he put his watch in his pocket.

"Come!" he said to himself, "I shall get there in time, in spite of the bad luck which, in all this busi-

ness, seems to have taken pleasure in upsetting my plans. It shall not be said that my will had to yield to human obstacles. And what a series of circumstances apparently combined on purpose to delay me! The vessel which brings the first letter in which I am informed of the matter, which interests me to such a degree as to make me leave India suddenly, is met near the Moldave Islands by Javanese pirates, who take and strip it; so it is only by the second mail that I learn what it is so important for me to know. I charter the fastest sailing-vessel which I can find in Calcutta, and a frightful gale makes me lose eight days in the straits of Bab-el-Mandeb. Half of my crew leave the Ganges carrying away the germs of black cholera, and die most unseasonably. In the Red Sea I find the plague, and the Isthmus of Suez barred by a series of quarantines. I write on a camel's hump a letter to worthy Macgill which must have reached him all in tatters, perfumed with vinegar and aromatic fumigations, tattooed with twenty colours like the skin of a Caribbean, and transmitted with respectful terror by the tongs of the health officers. At the risk of being shot down I evade quarantines, — for, amazing to relate, the plague was afraid of the cholera. Fortunately I

find idling along the shore not far from Alexandria worthy Captain Peppercull, a man without any prejudices, who is kind enough, in return for an immense sum, to take me on board his ship and carry me to England, carefully avoiding ports provided with lazarettos. Never have I been so nervous as on that accursed trip. I, who am usually so calm, was just like an empty-headed chit who has the vapours because her husband refuses to satisfy some unreasonable whim of hers. Well, I shall soon reach my journey's end; my letter, which must have arrived a day or two before me, has given them time to get everything ready. It is nine o'clock. In two hours more I shall be in London."

"Well, postilion," he said, going on with his monologue, as he lowered the window, "it seems to me that we are slackening our pace."

"My lord, unless we had the griffin spoken of in Scripture, or the car of fire of Elijah, we could not go any faster. I challenge any postilion, even were he paid six guineas, to get, no matter how hard he might whip them up, any greater speed out of the legs of four poor animals," majestically replied Little John, as he turned round.

However, as a slight concession to the extravagant desires of the traveller, Little John, who in his intercourse with society had acquired fine manners, cracked his whip two or three times; but, as he had foreseen, the stimulus was now useless, and the lash, though laid on to the withers of the horses, did not bring out a single shiver of impatience or pain. Soon the near leader, who was blowing like a blacksmith's bellows, was covered with lather, his coat grew rough, his head plunged forward, his hoofs lost the rhythm of the gallop; he staggered and leaned against his companion, then fell on his side. The equipage, going at full speed and unable to pull up at once, dragged the poor animal for quite a distance, rolling up with his body the dust of the road.

Little John, having stopped his horses, dragged at the fallen animal by the bridle and struck it energetically with the handle of his whip, believing that it had merely stumbled and fallen, but Black was never to carry travellers any more in this life. His flanks, wet as if laved in water of the sky and of the sea, heaved with a last convulsion; he rose up in a delirium of pain and made a few steps, dragging the carriage out of the straight line. He looked like one of those phan-

toms of wan, mutilated horses that rise from amid the heaps of bodies on abandoned battle-fields. Overcome by the ascendency and terror of approaching death which they felt with a wonderful instinct, the other horses, in spite of Little John's efforts, who dragged at their bits, followed the staggering steps of their poor comrade, a prey to the black intoxication of agony. At the very moment when the carriage, completely out of its course, was about to upset on the edge of the road, Black rolled to the ground as if invisible knives had hamstrung him; his great, wild eyes grew dim and were covered with a bluish film; a mass of foam filled his bloody nostrils, and he stretched out his legs, that stiffened like posts. It was all over with Black, a fine horse, worthy of a better fate.

The whole thing had occurred in less time than it takes to write it.

The stranger sprang quickly from the carriage, his face giving evidence of the most violent annoyance.

"This is the last straw," he said in an accent of concentrated fury, as he kicked Black's body. "That wretched brute lying on the ground like a piece of black paper might at least have lived some ten minutes longer. Come, be quick! I can see the post-house

yonder; make haste towards it." And the stranger helped Little John, who had got down, in a way that betokened his thorough familiarity with horses. He undid the buckles without any hesitation, and disentangled easily the complications of the harness tangled by the desperate efforts of poor Black. The postilion, at first scandalised by the little feeling which the stranger showed for the dead horse, felt sincere admiration, and bestowed upon him his esteem, a thing which he was most chary of.

"What a pity that you are a nobleman!" he said to the stranger. "You could have made a handsome living in my business. But perhaps it is better for us that you are a lord. Poor Black!" he went on as he took off the bridle, "who would have thought this morning that you were eating your last measure of oats? This is a sad life!" Such was Black's funeral eulogy. If the orator lacked eloquence, at least he did not want for feeling. A suspicious moisture showed in his eyes, and if he had not just in time carried to his eyes the worn cuff of his sleeve, a tear might perhaps have rolled between his cheek chapped by cold and his nose reddened by wine. Black's soul, if anything survives in animals, must have felt satisfied

and forgiven Little John for the blows he might have unjustly struck on the body it had once inhabited; for he did not lavish marks of tenderness, and he was the most stoical postilion that ever threw a leg across a saddle.

"Forward!" cried the stranger, sharply.

Little John again bestrode his horse, and the carriage rolled on, not so fast, but still at a pretty good rate.

The post-house was reached in a few moments and the stranger, having plunged his hand into his pocket, drew it out full of coins which he poured hastily into the horny hand of the postilion.

"That is for your tip and your horse."

Little John, perfectly amazed, began a sentence of thanks so complicated that he was compelled to give up the attempt to finish it, and called out abruptly in the midst of his splendid periods, as if seized with a sudden inspiration, to the stable-boy who was mooning around the carriage: —

"Hey, Smith! throw a pail of water on the wheels. They are heated and might take fire." Indeed a light smoke was rising from the axles and showed that Little John's fear was in no wise chimerical.

The lout, as he saw the axles smoking, said:

'Why! that is true. You must have driven rather fast to-day, Little John, for without offence to you, your carriage, and your horses, it is a long time since you have had hot axles. Is your gentleman generous?"

"As generous as the lord mayor on the day he is installed. But if he is liberal, he is also very short-tempered, so you had better make haste."

Smith rapidly hastened to plunge the pail into a stone trough, and lavishly poured water upon the axles. Meanwhile the hostlers, as prompt as they were clever, had harnessed four fresh, spirited and vigorous horses, the postilion was in his saddle, and a well mounted courier had gone on ahead to order relays. Jack, better versed in matters of the sea than in travelling by land, had neglected to take this precaution. Master Geordie's carriage started again as if carried away by hippogriffs.

As he led back his horses, Little John could not help stopping for a few minutes by the body of Black stretched out on the road.

"Alas!" said the postilion, "he was a willing horse, —that was the cause of his death. He pulled the whole team. You will never die like that, you idlers and sloths," he added, as he made his whip light upon the fat, dappled quarters of the survivors, which replied to

this morality by a few kicks. "There is no fear of your ever breaking down your nervous systems."

In order to be done with the interesting Little John and to follow as we please our stranger on his mad course, let us add that this fellow, honest and conscientious in his own way, gave Master Geordie half the sum which he had received from the stranger as the price of Black; less virtuous postilions might have kept two-thirds for themselves.

No remarkable incidents marked the other stages. Master Geordie's carriage rolled with steady velocity over the wonderful English roads, smooth as billiard tables and better kept than the roads in our royal parks. Already on the horizon showed the vast pall of smoke that always overhangs the city of London. The sight of it gave greater pleasure to the traveller than the most splendid Venetian azure.

"Oh! there is the smoke of that old devil's kettle," said the stranger, as he rubbed his hands with an air of deep satisfaction. "We are getting along."

The cottages and houses, at first scattered, were now in denser masses, streets began to run into the road, the high chimney-stacks of the works, like Egyptian obelisks, rose in the heavens and belched their

black smoke into the gray mist; the pointed spire of Trinity Church, the squat belfry of St. Olave's, the sombre tower of Saint Saviour's with its four finials, mingled with the forest of chimney-pots, over which they soared with the same superiority as a celestial thought soars above terrestrial things and interests. Farther on, behind this foreground with its irregular outline due to the angles of the buildings, showed vaguely, through the bluish mist which floated over the river and the complicated spars and rigging of the ships, the outline of the Tower of London and the gigantic dome of Saint Paul's, a British imitation of Saint Peter's at Rome, which, its contours softened by the mist, showed rather well on the horizon. Whether the prospect was familiar to him, or whether pre-occupation had killed curiosity, the stranger merely glanced at the objects seen in succession through the window, in order to assure himself of the distance he had traversed.

The carriage crossed Southwark Bridge, making as much noise with its wheels as the chariot on the Salmonean brazen bridge, then entered, on the other side of the river coming up towards the Strand, the labyrinth of narrow streets which border the Thames, and stopped at the end of one of those passages known

in London by the name of lanes, in the neighbourhood of Saint Margaret's Church.

The stranger drew out his watch and seemed relieved of a great weight, — the hands pointed to eleven. He had come sixty miles in three hours. He cast on Saint Margaret's a glance of satisfaction, then resolutely entered the narrow lane, made darker by the shadow of the church and the height of the houses.

Scarcely had he gone a few steps when a man seemed to emerge from the wall against which he stood, and from which he was scarcely distinguished, owing to the dark colour of his garments. He advanced towards the stranger.

" You have come from yonder for what you know ? " he murmured as he passed near him.

" Yes, I am recommended by Macgill, Jack, and Captain Peppercull," replied the stranger in the same tone.

" Follow me. All is ready."

They walked to an ill-looking house whence they were no doubt being watched from within, for the door was at once noiselessly opened and closed.

While Master Geordie's olive-green travelling-carriage was travelling along the London road with the

terrific impetuosity we have described, the "Lovely Jenny" had not remained idle either. After having taken on board Macgill and Jack, she had continued on her way driven by a pretty breeze. Shakespeare's Cliff having been rounded, she had passed Deal and Dover, and following the line of white cliffs, had reached Ramsgate. Then, entering the river, she had stopped opposite Gravesend at nightfall, and had anchored behind the flotilla of Hull colliers, the black sails of which might have caused Theseus' father to die of grief. And there, with her debonair and peaceful look, she would have been taken for a respectable ship waiting for the tide to get up to London Bridge and land at the Custom House a most legitimate cargo. Yet her two lofty masts, her square yards, the fine lines of her hull, in which carrying power had been sacrificed to speed, gave to the "Lovely Jenny," in spite of her hypocritical appearance, a saucy, fly-away look which is not to be seen in vessels whose sole business is to carry molasses. On the other hand, however, no master could have shown more satisfactory papers than Captain Peppercull.

III

ALTHOUGH the house before which I have taken my reader is by no means of an engaging appearance, I hope he will not object to precede the stranger and his guide, and to enter it with me.

Externally it had nothing particularly repulsive, and looked very much like the other houses on the street. However, its narrow façade, compressed by the neighbouring buildings, which were wider, had an air of constraint, like a rascal who finds himself in good company. By the side of the ruddy, healthy faces of the neighbouring buildings, the brick of the walls, of an unhealthy yellow, gave the impression of the wan, unpleasant face of a debauchee. This house, for fear of squinting or being blind of one eye, had blinded itself altogether. Every window was closed, and in order to avoid reciprocity, nothing looked out of the house into the street. As is usual in London, a small area provided with a railing separated it from the

street. The railing, covered with the imperceptible coal dust which the English sky is constantly raining down, was as black as the balustrade around a tomb, and betokened on the part of the owner or the tenant utter carelessness of comfort or cleanliness, — that is, if the house were usually inhabited, for nothing in it revealed the presence of man. No smoke rose from the chimneys, and the brass bell-knob, covered with dust and verdigris, did not appear to have been touched for a long time; there was nothing living on the sleepy, gloomy, rain-washed walls.

If an attentive observer had studied the extraordinary aspect of the house, — the front of which, on account of the narrow breadth, admitted of only two windows and one room on each story, including the staircase, — he would have understood that the façade masked another edifice situated at some distance from the street and which was reached through this one; for the edges of the stone steps, worn and sunk in the centre, testified to more frequent traffic than the meanness of the place would have led one to suppose.

The door, in fact, opened into a long, dark, damp passageway through which fetid, icy-cold air, rarely renewed, circulated with difficulty. It was like the

atmosphere of a tomb, a cellar, or a dungeon. The walls of the narrow passage were polished about the height of a man by the continuous rubbing of greasy hands groping their way through the darkness. The floor was covered with a layer of mud, sticky in some places, hard in others, testifying to the coming and going of a great number of muddy feet. A few steps from the door the scanty light that filtered in through the dirty panes of the fan-light died away. One had to proceed then for a considerable space in the deepest darkness. It was probable that the passage was made through thick walls and could receive no light even by loopholes. Perhaps even in certain places it passed under-ground, judging from the water which made its way through the stones.

A man following this passage for the first time would very soon be thrown out of his reckoning by the numerous turns, and could not possibly make out in what direction he was proceeding. The stranger, preceded by the queer individual in the drab clothes, walked with a firm but prudent step, lifting up one foot only when he had got the other firmly placed; not that he had to fear any ambush or any trap, since the guide walked in front of him, but he felt that vague ap-

prehension inspired in the bravest of men by darkness and chill under a low vault between two narrow walls. Instinctively his hands sought under his cloak whether his two small pocket pistols were in their places.

At a great distance, in the obscurity, a few reddish rays began to show, indicating a lighted room, the beams filtering through the joints of an ill-closed door. The guide uttered a curious sound, evidently a signal agreed upon; the sound of bolts being drawn was heard within, and the door, opened slightly, suddenly shed into the dark passage a red rush of light.

Using my privilege as a novelist, I shall penetrate before the stranger into the strange place where he seemed expected; although in truth, it was impossible to guess what kind of relations could exist between this young man with the fine, noble face and the curious dwellers within that den.

It was a rather large room, in which the eye was first attracted by a chimneypiece of ancient form, in which burned in a grate a very bright fire of coal, the brilliant reflections of which illumined the room; for the wretched light coming in through the window, the lower panes of which were carefully whitened, and which opened upon one of those sombre wells that

are called yards in great cities, counted for nothing. The two window-panes left clean showed only awnings and roofs covered with tiles of an ugly red, chimney-pots, and black hoardings,—in a word, the whole of the interior wretchedness of a mean, ignoble building.

The walls, the lower part of which had been bared by the constant rubbing of shoulders, preserved in the upper portion some traces of a wash of a dark red tone like dried blood. On this background the customers of the place had, while waiting or while idle, engraved with a nail or a knife innumerable drawings and arabesques of the most fanciful description; the white lines stood out like the outlines on Etruscan vases, and gave proof of as pure and as primitive an art. The favourite theme of these unknown artists, the one most frequently reproduced amid the ornamental fantasies, was, it must be confessed, a gallows adorned with its fruits. Did this choice betray habitual preoccupation, or was it due to the pretty effect produced by the three uprights of the English gibbet united at the top by crossbeams forming a triangle, the picturesque silhouette of which attracted the artists? That is a difficult question to answer.

The drawings, though coarse, were remarkable at least for technical accuracy and fidelity. In spite of the barbarous drawing and the monstrous anatomical license indulged in, the movements and attitudes of the small figures represented as hung had a striking truthfulness which the most advanced art does not always attain. The running knots were well placed, and it was plain that they had been drawn by assiduous spectators of the Tyburn stage. These grotesque sketches, drawn with hideous joviality, made one laugh and tremble.

Numerous drawings, sections and elevations of Newgate, alternated with this pleasant subject; these, though lacking in architectural correctness, betrayed at least a thorough knowledge and a very clear remembrance of the place. Heads of smokers with the most bizarre profiles faced crowned lions and other apocalyptic beasts; vessels more fantastic than those of Della Bella rose and fell on impossible seas. All these things were drawn boldly, without much regard to the neighbouring sketch. Dates, monograms, and letters of the most amazing caligraphy complicated this hideous breviary on which the only words legible were "idleness," "vice," and "crime."

Yet the decoration of the room had not been wholly left to the fancy of chance artists; a more cultured art was evident in the coloured woodcuts representing the seven-branched candlestick, Susannah and the Elders, the portrait of George III, the Return of the Prodigal Son, the principal figures of boxing, the exploits of Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild, the Cid and the Bernardo del Carpio of the picaresque *romancero*, cock-fights, matches between famous bulldogs, Epsom and Newmarket races, etc.

The hot stifling atmosphere, full of miasma and coal smoke, tobacco and the strong smell of whiskey, floated through the room and proved that those who could put up with it had very strong olfactory nerves. Yet the three or four individuals who were in the place did not seem to experience any annoyance from it; on the contrary, their dull, vulgar faces had an expression of coarse comfort. They were dressed in black coats, satin vests and round hats; but before these clothes had reached them — having once perhaps belonged to Beau Brummel — they had evidently performed many a pilgrimage, and suffered many a misadventure. These tattered garments, of a cloth once lustrous and of a cut still elegant, and which in their degradation preserved

something of the shape which their first fashionable possessor had given to them, formed a sadly comical caricature, a mute satirical poem full of raillery and derision. One of the men, however, did not wear the wretched fashionable costume. A red woollen shirt, an oilskin coat, and a leather hat with a string for a chin-strap formed his dress, — that of a sailorman. A bold expression relieved the triviality and harshness of his features, and in his eyes, of a blue as clear and cold as that of the Polar ocean, shone a ray of intelligence. The others, indeed, seemed to address him somewhat deferentially, though he was leaning on the same table and helping himself from the same jug of half-and-half.

"Well, Saunders," said one of the men in black coats to the red-shirted sailor, "the time is approaching when the gentleman for whom we are to work is to come."

"Yes," shortly answered Saunders, who, while drinking, was busy kneading in the palm of his hand some black stuff pressed between two pieces of cloth.

"Do you know the gentleman, Saunders?" went on the speaker.

"No," replied Saunders, who plainly was fond of monosyllables.

"Ah!" added, by way of closing the conversation the black-coated man, as he leaned meditatively on the table.

Saunders rose, and going towards the fire, held out to the flame the dark substance, which he spread on the piece of linen cut in the shape of a mask.

"Do you propose to disguise yourself, and to go to the masked ball with Handsome Nancy?" went on the obstinate talker.

"I feel uncommonly like sticking this plaster on your face and shutting up your mouth with it, you unbearable talker," replied Saunders, with a growl as fierce as that of a white bear worried on an ice-floe by a whaleman's boat-hook. "Instead of questioning me, go and lift the trap and see if the others have arrived."

Noll went to one corner of the room, removed a trunk and a few packages, took hold of a ring in the floor, and with the help of his comrade Bob, raised the heavy trap-door. As it opened, a puff of cold, damp air blew into the room. Bob stiffening his arms, which, though thin and skinny, were very vigorous, supported the half-open trap-door. Kneeling on the edge of the opening, Noll plunged his head within the abyss. The bottom was so obscure that nothing could be made out,

yet the strength and freshness of the current of air forbade the supposition that this trap was merely an opening into a cellar. By listening attentively, one might discern in the distance the low lipping of water.

"I hear nothing," said Noll, after listening for a few moments; "I shall give the signal." And he uttered a modulated, guttural cry which sounded within the recesses of the subterranean place, though nothing answered save the echo.

"Never mind," said Saunders, "we don't need them yet, and it is no great fun to have to wait under that black vault. It will be dark early to-day," he continued mentally, looking towards the two bars through which one might have perceived the heavens if the fog, thicker and thicker, had not completely covered them. "All the better, the job will be so much the easier. Bob, is the dray ready, the one loaded with goods, which is to obstruct the end of the lane to prevent our being interrupted during our job?"

"Yes, Master Saunders, Cuddy is by his horses, and will make such a fine block that a ferret itself could not get into the lane. He is a clever fellow. To see him got up as he is, you would swear that he had never done anything in his life but drive drays, though

it is not his business," answered Bob, laughing and apparently delighted with his own joke. "You will be able to do your work as if you were in a wood or on a desert shore."

"You are too clever by half, Bob," answered Saunders; "you won't live to the day of your death. You look out."

While this was going on in the room adorned with the marvellous drawings which I have described, a narrow, light, fish-like yawl pulled by four oarsmen who seemed worked by mechanism, so mathematically synchronous were all their movements, was ascending the Thames without appearing to mind the roughness of the sea and the tidal eddies. The oars struck the water without a single splash, and opened and closed as easily as a pretty woman's fan. Although the fog, still thickening, made steering difficult and increased the chances of collision among the lines of ships that formed a floating city below London Bridge, the yawl slipped rapidly between the obstacles with incredible skill and speed. She seemed to carry at her bows, so great was her divining sensibility, the tentacles which make certain insects foresee objects, and which are, as it were, the eyes of the sense of touch.

When it had passed London Bridge, the enormous arches of which showed in great black masses against a gray sky, forming a Martyn-like effect which the English call Babylonian, and found itself in a less crowded reach, it flew along with increased speed. It was capable, apparently, of ascending a weir or a cascade like a trout.

Soon it passed, one after the other, Southwark and Blackfriars Bridges, and hugging the shore more closely, it ran past the Temple and the Temple Gardens; shaving Somerset House, it slipped under Waterloo Bridge by the arch nearest the bank, drew to the side, and disappeared within a low arch half masked by the projections of the buildings in the centre of which it was cut. A few laden barges were moored around, and the building, of brick and timber, so far as one could make out in the mist, looked like a warehouse.

The boat shot in under the low vault, which extended much farther than might have been supposed, as a sudden turn not far from the entrance cleverly concealed its depth. After a few minutes of careful rowing, the men unshipped their oars, and one of them, groping for a ring made fast to the wall, found

it, drew the painter through it, and made the boat fast. Then, one after another they leaped on to the lower step, half covered with water, of a stair which their knowledge of the place made them find at once in spite of the deep darkness in which they were plunged. An iron grating which one of the seamen opened, closed the passage at this spot.

The stair, after rising thirty steps, ended in a ceiling which the first man struck pretty hard with his head.

"The devil take it!" he said, "I did n't count right and missed one step as I came up. The consequence is I have got a bump on my forehead. Fortunately, my skull is hard."

"Well, Snuff, what has hit you? What are you cursing about there like an old papist woman spelling her beads, instead of knocking on the floor and giving the signal? Do you think it is fun for us behind you on this stair which is steeper than the ladder of a gibbet?"

"I shall knock on the ceiling and call out at the same time."

A low knock was soon heard through the passage, followed by a prolonged yell.

"Who is that below the floor?" said Saunders, starting at the well-known sound and stamping with his heel on the trap. "Quiet, you old mole, I am coming," he added, turning to his own use the speech of Hamlet to the shadow, for Saunders had recently seen at Drury Lane Theatre this play of old Shakespeare's, which had made a deep impression on his coarse but poetic nature.

The trap-door was opened, and, thrown back on its hinges, gave passage out of the damp abyss to four fellows who, if they did not look quite respectable, bore at least on their weather-beaten faces a significantly astute and bold expression indicative of energetic qualities applied perhaps to other than lawful ends.

"Is there any gin or whiskey left?" cried the first man who set foot on the floor, and who at once proceeded to the table to ascertain whether a drop of the precious liquors still remained.

"Oh!" said the next one, "when Noll and Bob are seated opposite each other for fifteen minutes with a bottle between them, the poor little thing soon dies of consumption."

"Don't worry, Snuff," answered Noll, drawing a full bottle from a corner. "Beelzebub himself would

lick his lips if he tasted this. It is pure vitriol, liquid fire, undiluted by anything soft. I wonder if you are like me. The longer I live, the weaker I think gin."

"That is the way of life, old fellow. The longer you go, the more you lose your illusions. We have all believed that gin was strong. What fools we are when we are young," moaned Snuff, as he poured himself out a bumper of blue ruin.

The conversation had got so far when the stranger and his guide, having first made the signal agreed upon, entered the room. The stranger cast a quick glance at the worthy rascals, who involuntarily looked down, except Saunders, whose face showed fiercer among the others. There was in him the stuff of a criminal; the others were capable of misdemeanours only; he was a pirate; the others nothing more than thieves. The stranger, with the quickness of a cultivated mind, guessed that the least ignoble in the company was Saunders. With a single glance he made him the chief, and it was to him that he addressed himself.

"Has everything been prepared according to the plan agreed upon?" said the stranger, in a calm, imperative tone.

"Yes, my lord, we merely await your good pleasure," answered Saunders, politely, but with no servility.

"Good. The time to act has come."

"All right," said Noll to Bob; "go and tell Cuddy to enter the lane with his dray."

Bob went out, after having tried to polish up his hairless beaver, for he said a man must always endeavour to look as if he were a man of the world. Saunders arranged his pitch mask in the palm of his huge hand and prepared to follow him.

"The man with whom I shall be chatting when I enter the lane is the one you have to carry off," said the stranger; "but above all, be neither violent nor brutal to him."

"You may rest assured of that, my lord. The gentleman will be handled as delicately as a box marked 'fragile,'" replied Noll with all a smuggler's conceit.

The men went out one after another, to avoid suspicion, and loafed in the most natural fashion into the deserted lane. The stranger went on by himself towards Saint Margaret's Church.

IV

USING my privilege as a novelist, I shall pass without any transition from the sombre den I have just described to an elegant residence in the West End. This digression, far from taking us away from our story, brings us back to it. The scene is very different, but it is not because I have sought a contrast.

Miss Annabel Vyvyan's maid had just put the finishing touches to her bridal dress, and, by way of final precaution, was fixing with another pin, passed through the thick braid of brown hair on Annabel's head, a long veil of English point-lace which fell in transparent folds over the white wedding-dress. Mary and Susan, the two other maids, when they saw the veil at last adjusted, took two candles that were burning on the table, and held them up so that their young mistress might conveniently see herself in the mirror; for although it was nearly eleven in the forenoon, scarcely did a faint ray of light penetrate through the

windows and curtains. A yellow, thick, choking fog, such as is not unusual in London, weighed down upon the city and prolonged through the day the shadows of night.

The head which, illumined by the sudden radiance of light, was reflected as if surrounded by an aureole upon the dark background of the mirror, was of a beauty in no wise inferior to the purest creations of Greek art. The most striking thing about that divine face was the milky, marble-like, dazzling, luminous whiteness, in which the features showed with the transparency and delicacy of Oriental alabaster. Although it is a habit of young brides about to proceed to the altar to blush a rosy red, Annabel's cheeks were scarcely coloured by a faint, rosy flush like that which colours the heart of a white rose. The blue blood of aristocracy veined her delicate flesh, a hothouse flower which neither wind nor rain had ever fallen upon, a fine pulp composed of exquisite juices and pure elements in which plebeian rusticity had no share whatever. Freedom from material cares, the refinements of hereditary luxury, the perfect comfort of life, the living in vast apartments and in country-seats with great shady parks traversed by running waters, joined

to the purity of the race, often bring beauty to unimaginable perfection. The living marble in which are carved these beautiful bodies has no rival in the world for its brilliancy, its fineness, and the transparency of the grain. The quarries of the human Paros and Pentelicus are found in ancient Albion, so called rather on account of its women than of its cliffs. Annabel was the fairest maid in that swans' nest anchored in mid-ocean.

Two delicate black eyebrows met at the root of the nose, — which a slight aquiline inflection made more noble than a Greek nose, without depriving it of any portion of its exquisite form, — and crowned two eyes of an intense, warm brown, the pupils of which floated on a crystal limpidly blue. Lips of a bright red showed like a carnation in her pallor, which became all the more marked and striking on that account. Down Annabel's lovely cheeks fell two soft, silky lustrous curls which she twisted around her finger. In giving this last touch to her toilet she showed a hand of charming shape, narrow, somewhat long, with slender fingers ending in polished nails brilliant as jade, and of irreproachable aristocratic purity. Such hands, that drive to despair the new-made rich, are the product

of centuries of elegant life and are transmitted like diamonds from generation to generation.

Apparently, Annabel was satisfied with her looks, for a faint smile flitted over her serious face, and turning towards Fanny she said in a voice as harmonious as music: "Fanny, you have surpassed yourself to-day. I really do not look badly."

"You are not difficult to dress, Miss — for I may still call you so. You become your gowns so well."

"You flatterer! What o'clock is it?"

"Just eleven," answered Fanny, after having glanced at a clock inlaid with mother-of-pearl and standing upon a pedestal.

"Eleven o'clock already, and my aunt Lady Eleanor Braybrooke has not arrived!"

"I think," replied Fanny, "that I hear a carriage stopping at the door. It must be Lady Eleanor."

A thunder of raps sounded in the lower part of the house as Fanny ended, betokening the arrival of an important personage. A few minutes later a powdered, silk-stockinged footman announced, as he raised the portière: —

"Lady Eleanor Braybrooke."

A majestic, stiff-looking woman, of that age politely

called a certain age, entered the room with such automatic stiffness that her thick silk dress did not undulate in the least. She seemed to be moved by internal wheels and to be advancing on little brass casters like the dolls which a concealed mechanism drives around a table. The corselet which moulded her charms, developed by the stoutness of her fourth youth, would have warded off a lance-thrust as surely as Milanese mail, so well reinforced was it with whalebone, steel, and other compressive materials. How in the world the lady had managed to get herself into that sheath is a mystery of her toilet which I shall respect, but she must have undergone a pressure of forty atmospheres to attain the result.

Her broad, square face was diapered with all the colours of an eruption. Her cheeks flamed, her nose was almost like a live coal, her very brow was red. Her incandescent face was framed in by hair of a British auburn fiercely curled, and resembling filaments of vegetable silks rather than human hair. Her expression would have been almost coarse but for two eyes of a hard, cold steel-gray which relieved the commonplaceness by their disdainful and imperative look. That glance of hers stamped her as a great

lady, a woman in high life, in spite of the heaviness of her shape and the brilliancy of her complexion.

Lady Eleanor Braybrooke was a widow, and acted as chaperon to her niece, Miss Annabel Vyvyan, who when quite young had been left an orphan and absolute mistress of a large fortune. In the important ceremony which was about to take place, Lady Eleanor Braybrooke was to act the part of the mother.

Miss Annabel was about to be married, although not very romantically, no obstacle having come in the way, to a charming young fellow, Sir Benedict Arundel, who loved her and whom she had been in love with for nearly a year. He was young and handsome, noble and rich; the match was entirely suitable in every respect, since the bride possessed precisely the same qualities.

"Look, aunt! what a horrid fog!" said Miss Annabel, turning her lovely eyes to the window.

"At the beginning of November that is not astonishing," replied Lady Eleanor.

"No doubt. But I should have liked for this day, the loveliest in my life, an azure sky, a bright sun, the perfumes of flowers and the songs of birds."

"My dear, if you have a room with good hangings,

plenty of tapers, a bright fire in the grate, a bottle of scent and an Érard piano you can dispense with all these things. I never trouble about the weather, for my own part."

"You are always practical, aunt."

"And you always poetic, my niece."

"I wish nature shared our feelings more. The sadness of the heavens weighs down on my happy soul."

"My dear child, if God at your request were suddenly to remove the fog, the splendour of the sunshine might perhaps strike some suffering heart as ironical."

"That is true, aunt, but I cannot help being a little nervous this morning."

"Well, Sir Benedict Arundel will soon relieve you of that," answered Lady Eleanor Braybrooke, with the equivocal, wrinkled smile people of her age are too fond of indulging in.

The sound of a carriage was heard under the window, and very soon Sir Benedict Arundel appeared.

He was dressed quietly and plainly, with that exquisite perfection characteristic of the perfect gentleman, which never draws the eye, and the secret of which the English alone possess. He had avoided the

almost insurmountable ridicule of wedding garments, and yet his costume was such as became the solemnity of the occasion. In accordance with the custom of the day, he wore neither beard, moustache, nor royal, nor any of the ornaments which bristle upon the faces of men on the continent. His smooth, polished face was surrounded by dark-brown whiskers, carefully curled, which an artist fond of the picturesque might have thought too regular, but which would certainly have obtained the approval of the late Brummel and Count d'Orsay. He had the Antinoüs features, somewhat long and cold, which the great families of England often exhibit, and his head looked like a copy of that of some Greek god made by Westmacott or Chantrey. It was impossible to imagine a better-matched pair.

The cloud on Annabel's brow vanished at the sight of her betrothed; the blue eyes of Benedict were azure enough for any heaven. A pure joy illumined the charming face of the young girl, as she held out her hand to Benedict, who kissed it. Lady Eleanor Braybrooke's gray eyes sparkled at the picture, that no doubt recalled a similar scene in which she had played a part, but so long ago that it certainly required an excellent memory to remember it.

"That is just the way we were," she whispered to herself, "dear Sir George Alan Braybrooke and I, some twenty years ago or so."

The "or so" was rather enigmatical, but Lady Eleanor did not care to state more accurately, even to herself, any date which might have given the exact number of her years. That mental comparison would have occurred to no one but the good lady, for when young she had not even the devil's beauty, and Sir George Alan Braybrooke, tall, thin, stiff, bony, with a square chin, a nose like Wellington's and a square-cut mouth, had never resembled, even in the days when he was a lover, the elegant Benedict Arundel.

"Come, children, it is time to go," went on Lady Eleanor. "The chaplain has no doubt already put on his surplice, and the guests are arriving in numbers." She entered her carriage with Annabel, and Benedict took a seat in his own with William Bawtry, a friend of his.

The coachmen, powdered and beribboned, wearing huge bouquets, their scarlet faces made more crimson still by numerous libations to the health of the future pair and their descendants, took up the reins with an incomparably grand air, clucked their tongues, touched

up their horses, and the procession started for the church. The sun had made useless efforts to dispel the fog brought down by the west wind upon the city of London, and its pale, rayless orb scarcely indicated its place in the heavens by a livid spot liker the face of a sick man than the brilliant star of day. The gas lamps, still lighted, gave out beams almost immediately swallowed up by the fog. At a short distance the various objects, showing faint, assumed strange, fantastic forms. The carriages loomed like leviathans and behemoths, the passers-by like giant phantoms; the sombre walls of the buildings assumed the appearance of Babel, and it took all the skill of the coachmen not to lose their way through the opaque air in which sonorous vibrations were deadened and which seemed to have covered the streets with a pall of clouds.

The church where the wedding was to take place was Saint Margaret's, a building in the Norman-Gothic style, with a square tower, great buttresses, and a huge quatrefoiled window. The building was lugubrious to look at, with its walls black as ebony; the mouldings, washed by the rain, always appeared to be covered with snow. It rose in the centre of a graveyard without any verdure and strewn with tombs, the shape of which,

faintly recalling that of a body, had a sinister and horrible look. A railing, which the coal-dust given out by the hundred thousand chimneys of London made more sooty than the air-holes of hell, surrounded this God's acre, made more gloomy still by the near bustle of the city. The high tower rose with its crown of invisible finials in the fog and seemed to have been cut off. The porch, sombre and smoky like an oven, opened its wide gates, looking like the mouth of an orc or some other huge animal breathing vapour out of its nostrils. The fog which filled the great nave seemed to be the breath of the architectural monster. Unquestionably, without being superstitious, a young couple might very well, at the sight of this lugubrious church, entertain some doubts as to their future happiness. One shuddered unavoidably on entering this church darker than Erebus, and within the depths of which shone no beam of light, no star of hope. Certainly it would have been unjust to ask of an old and wretched Protestant church in London, at the end of September on a foggy day, the bright and happy look of an antique temple with its white columns showing against the blue of an Athenian sky; but the truth is that that morning Saint Margaret's looked more like a

sepulchral vault prepared for the reception of the dead than a church in which a loving couple was to be married.

"Well," said Sir William Bawtry to his friend Sir Benedict Arundel in their carriage, "so it is true that you are going to be married at twenty-four, in the flower of your age, when so long a life of pleasure and enjoyment was still open to you!"

"At twenty-four, — you are right, dear William. Marriage is a piece of folly which one should not commit save when young."

"I am quite of your opinion, and besides, Annabel justifies your prompt resolution; but when we were together at Cambridge no one would have ventured to predict that you would be the first of our jolly band to be caught in the trap of wedlock."

While Sir William Bawtry and Sir Benedict Arundel were thus chatting as they drove to the Church of Saint Margaret, a man who had left the neighbouring street slipped under the sombre porch and stood against the wall between two pillars like the stone statue of a saint. He wore a broad-brimmed hat pulled down over his eyes, and the end of his travelling-cloak thrown over his shoulder concealed the lower part of his face.

What was visible of his features appeared to be tanned by the sun of other climes.

After a few moments of dreamy motionlessness he freed one of his hands from the folds of his cloak, and pulling out a large flat watch, he said to himself: "This is the hour, they will soon come." And he put back the watch into his pocket. Of whom were these words, murmured with a strange accent, spoken?

The carriages, turning the corner of the street, now arrived before the porch of the church. Then the man, whom my readers have already recognized as the eager traveller, threw back his cloak and seemed to take a firmer stand, like one approaching a supreme crisis.

The steps of the carriage were lowered. Annabel, leaning slightly on Benedict's hand, was about to descend and enter the porch, when the stranger, having bowed deeply to the bride, touched Arundel's arm. The latter turned around abruptly, astonished at such an interruption at such a time, for, as he was turning his back to the church, he had not seen the man with the mantle coming forward.

"Sidney!" cried Benedict, on recovering from his first amazement.

"In person," replied gravely the man thus addressed.

"And I, who accused you of indifference! And so you have come from India to be present at my wedding! That is why you did not reply to my letters, — you wanted to give me the pleasure of a surprise."

"Benedict, I have a single word to say to you, and it is for that I have come."

"Well, you can tell me presently. I shall introduce you to my wife, — and indeed, you are already presented to her. Lady Arundel, Sir Arthur Sidney."

"No, I must speak to you at once and alone, if but for a moment."

There was something so firm in Sidney's look and so imperious an accent in his voice that Benedict hesitatingly let fall Annabel's hand and drew towards his friend.

"Your ladyship will be kind enough to pardon my insisting," said Sidney, seizing Benedict's arm with a smile of affected grace. "I have but a word to say to him." And he drew Benedict to the corner of the church at the entrance to the little street that leads up one side of it.

Annabel had sat down by her aunt, Lady Eleanor Braybrooke, who grumbled at this untimely interruption.

"Most improper, to turn up from India in that way, to intercept a bridegroom at the very threshold of the church! A nice time he has chosen to talk his nonsense!"

"Sir Arthur Sidney is an eccentric man who never does anything like any one else," replied Annabel. "Benedict has often told me how queer he is."

"But a well-bred man ought not to have any eccentric friends," replied Lady Braybrooke, in the most majestically disdainful tone.

Annabel smiled at her aunt's proud indignation.

"I should not," continued the dowager, whose face had turned crimson, — "I should not have allowed Sir George Alan Braybrooke to leave me at the moment of leading me to the altar, were it for the empire of the world. But the word which Mr. Sidney had to say seems to be pretty long."

Lady Braybrooke's reflection had already occurred to Annabel, for she put her head, crowned with virginal flowers, out of the window of the carriage to see if Benedict had returned. But no one yet appeared at the corner of the church, the most distant point to which the fog allowed the glance to reach. The position was becoming singularly ridiculous.

Helped by Sir William Bawtry, Annabel and Lady Braybrooke got out of the carriage and took shelter under the porch. Sir William offered to notify Benedict and Sidney of the impropriety of such a conversation prolonged so long.

The guests, already astonished, surrounded Miss Vyvyan, and advised her to enter the nave; the passers-by were beginning to look with surprise at the beautiful girl dressed in white, a bride without a groom, standing under the dark porch.

As she entered the church, Annabel felt on her shoulders, scarcely covered by the thin lace veil, a damp, cloister-like chill; she seemed to be enveloped forever in the cold of the convent and the sepulchre. She had a presentiment that she was passing from light into shadow, from bustle into silence, from life into death. She thought she felt breaking within her the spring of her life.

Sir William Bawtry returned pale, thunder-struck, not knowing which way to look. He had traversed in all its length the lane entered by Benedict and Sidney, had been round the church and had examined every spot, but Benedict and Sidney had disappeared.

V

AT about the same time when Annabel was finishing dressing, in another London house another young girl was also putting on, but slowly and as if regretfully, her white wedding-robes.

She was beautiful and extremely pale; faint violet lines showed upon her eyelids and gave proof of tears recently shed, the traces of which the corner of her handkerchief, dipped in fresh water, had not caused to disappear completely. Her drawn mouth tried to smile, but the corners of her lips turned up with an effort only to draw down again with pain. Short, painful breathing made her bosom heave, and when the maid approached to place upon her brow the wreath of orange flowers, a slight flush coloured her pale cheeks.

Miss Edith Harley looked more like a victim being prepared for sacrifice than a maiden going to the altar to freely pledge her love and faith. Yet Edith was not the victim of stern parents: neither a barbarous father nor an ill-tempered mother compelled her choice. Her

lovely, delicate hand was not being forcibly put into the gouty hand of an obscene and abominable old man. The man whom she was about to marry, Lord de Volmerange, was young, handsome, charming, and of an excellent family; in a word, all that the most practical parents and the most romantic girl could wish. Edith had even appeared to accept willingly the attentions of Count de Volmerange, and in the interviews which had preceded their betrothal, her eyes had often turned towards the young lord with an indefinable expression of melancholy and love; though usually his presence threw her into a state of agitation and anxiety visible only to an observer, and which did not agree with certain glances full of fire, strange in a young girl otherwise apparently so modest.

Did she hate or did she love de Volmerange? That was a mystery difficult to solve. If she did not love him, why did she marry him? If she did love him, why was she so pale, weeping, and cast down? An only child, worshipped by her father and mother, she had but to say a word to have the marriage broken off. Why should she not say it? Any man of her choice would have been accepted by Lord Harley and his wife, for, having no other desire than to make their

daughter happy, no prejudices of caste could have induced them to force her inclinations; they would have accepted a poet even.

When Edith's maids had done their work, which was delayed by the uneasiness and the preoccupation of the girl, who unwillingly yielded herself up to them, she signed that she was tired and wished to remain alone for a few moments.

As soon as the women had withdrawn, a slight knock, which might have been mistaken for the sound made behind the hangings by the insect vulgarly called the death beetle, as it strikes the wall with its antennæ to call its female, sounded in the corner of the room in a place where was a condemned door. On hearing the sound, evidently a signal, Edith started as if she had not been forewarned. A look of deep anxiety darkened her face, and she rose abruptly from the arm-chair in which she had thrown herself. A second knock sounded a little louder, though yet low.

Presently the young girl staggered towards the door, pressing her hands to her heart, the beating of which stifled her.

A third, sharp, imperious knock, in which annoyance prevailed over the fear of being heard by any one else

than Edith, testified to the impatience of the mysterious visitor.

Poor Edith moved away a small piece of furniture which half masked the false door, and drew the bolts with a trembling hand. A key, working from outside, sounded in the lock, and the leaf, half opened and at once closed, gave passage to a man who was not Count de Volmerange.

The man who so singularly and so secretly entered the room of a maiden who in a few hours was to be another's wife, had a face which at first it would have been difficult to characterise. His slightly olive complexion with its mat tone brought out two singularly mobile eyes, the expression of which was purposely deadened. His mouth was well shaped, but the thin, closely compressed lips seemed to preserve a secret, and the lower lip, frequently bitten, betokened repressed impulses and necessary restraint accepted by the will, but not by the blood. The nose, too thin in outline, too pointed in spite of its good shape, gave an astute expression to the rest of the face. It was a head in which no defect could be found, which one was inclined to say was handsome, but which yet produced an unaccountably repellent effect. It attracted

and repelled at one and the same time by a sort of dangerous grace, of troublous charm. The colours which shine brightly upon a bird's wing assume, on the spotted skin of a serpent, without losing any of their brilliancy, an evil, venomous tint which is beautiful but terrifying. The man to whom Miss Edith had just opened a door closed to every one had the beauty of the viper and the grace of the tiger. It would have been difficult to tell his age. His smooth brow had none of the wrinkles, none of the marks made by years on a human face; he might have been a mere youth but for his icy coldness and lack of spontaneity, signs of dissimulation long practised. His was not a face, it was a mask.

His dress was black and neutral brown, quietly elegant, not drawing the eye by any detail and leaving no impression on the memory.

There was a moment of painful silence. Edith, embarrassed, seemed to wait until the stranger should speak, but the latter did not appear disposed to save her the trouble. His attitude was respectful rather by habit than from real deference, and he cast straight at the girl a masterful glance.

"So you persist," said Edith, making an effort, "in wishing me to be Count de Volmerange's wife?"

"I shall certainly not change my intention now. The wedding is more necessary than ever."

"And yet you know that it is impossible."

"It is so absolutely impossible that in two hours it will have taken place."

"Listen, Xavier, there is still time. Do not force me to act a lie before God and man. I can throw myself at my parents' feet, confess everything, and obtain forgiveness for myself — and you. My crime is great, but their indulgence is boundless."

"You shall not do it. I would give you the lie."

"Even if I took all the blame on myself?"

"I should maintain that I was always a stranger to you."

"But I have proofs that can confound you," cried Edith indignantly, as she hastened to a small box, the concealed bottom of which she opened.

"You think so, do you," answered Xavier, with an ironical smile playing over his thin lips.

With a convulsive hand Edith rummaged violently in the box, from which she withdrew some papers that, by the way they were folded, seemed to be letters. She opened one and cast it down. It was blank; a second and a third were the same; then she dropped

the parcel and her arms fell by her side. Every trace of writing had disappeared; the letters were now simply plain sheets of paper.

"Happily *your* ink, Miss Edith, was intended to last longer than mine. The precious characters traced by your lovely hand are quite visible on the letters which you condescended to write to me."

"Xavier, there is in all this a riddle which I cannot read. I am young and beautiful; you have told me so in more ways than did the serpent to Eve. The one fault I have committed was for your sake. You alone have the right to consider me innocent. My fortune is great, my family bears one of the most honoured names in England and has never been disgraced by any one but me. This unsuspected stain you can wash away with a word. You have no other resources than those of your education, which makes you worthy of a rank far higher than that which you now occupy. If you marry me, a new world will open before you: you shall pass from darkness into light, your life will broaden out; you will be able to use in a great sphere the talents you possess. What has been a dream will become a reasonable wish; politics and diplomacy have nothing too high for you."

As Edith spoke, Xavier's pale face flushed, his eyes, which he no longer deadened, flashed; he followed in his mind the young girl into the regions which she showed him as if to tempt him and to obtain from ambition what she had failed to get from love. Once indeed he seized Edith's hand, and grasped it firmly; but the impulse was of short duration, the brilliancy of his eyes died out, over his face spread again the gloomy look which concealed the emotions of his soul, and he went on in an icy tone: —

"You shall marry Count de Volmerange."

"Your refusal, which I fail to understand, can have but one cause. In that case there is no remedy for my misfortune. Perhaps you have already a wife in France."

"No," replied Xavier, in a strange tone, "neither in France nor elsewhere. I am a bachelor."

Edith, who until then had supplicated him, rose and with the most dignified and majestic air said to the young man: "It is not through love for you that I have so earnestly entreated you. You fascinated me, but I have never loved you. You acted on me as a philter or a poison might do, and I am no more guilty than if a potion had robbed me of my senses. I have

never loved you, thank God! I am proud of it. It is my one consolation. My eyes, blinded for one moment, were quickly opened. When I heard the true eloquence of the heart, when I saw the heaven's light shining in a true man's look, I saw at once that I had been the prey and the sport of a demon, and I loved Count de Volmerange as much as I hated you, I esteemed him as highly as I despised you. Yes, I love him madly, with all the strength of my heart and soul," added Miss Edith Harley, insisting cruelly, as she saw Xavier's pale face turning green; "and I desired to spare him the shame of marrying a girl whom you have soiled. But I shall tell him everything; he will forgive me and avenge me. And now, sir, go, or I shall ring and have you thrown out of the window!" she cried in a tone which betokened the revolt of her aristocratic blood.

As she said these words, she advanced one step, and Xavier, as if blasted by the blaze of indignation that flashed from Edith's eyes, staggered back through the door, which closed violently upon him. The last glance of the wretch was like that of the serpent which feels the lion's claw in its back. Edith shot the bolts, put back the furniture, and the sound of

Xavier's steps died away on the stairs as Lord and Lady Harley entered the room.

Anger had brought back the colour of life to Edith's cheeks, and the fire of indignation had concealed every trace of tears in her burning eyes. The calm of a supreme resolve smoothed her brow. So Lady Harley, as she drew her daughter to her heart, said to her caressingly: —

"My dear Edith, I am delighted to see that you have overcome the sadness in which you were plunged. I was afraid this marriage was repugnant to you, and that a vain fear of breaking your word at the last moment alone induced you to carry it out. I would not have a single worldly consideration compromise the happiness of your life, and although Lord Harley finds in Count de Volmerange every quality which one could desire in a son-in-law, he has come with me to tell you not to bind yourself by a marriage which has so greatly troubled and distressed you. When I was about to wed your dear father, I felt nothing of the kind. The deepest confidence and the most celestial serenity, the calmest and most penetrating joy, filled my soul. These must be the feelings of a girl when she is about to be married to him whom

she is to accompany to the tomb and to meet in the next life."

"Mother," answered Edith, kissing Lady Harley, "and you, dearest and most honoured father, I thank you with deep gratitude for what you have just said. I cannot tell you how deeply I am touched by these proofs of your love. Your anxiety is unfounded. Pray be reassured; your choice is mine. Like you, I think Count de Volmerange high-bred, full of the noblest and most generous feelings, of perfect elegance and thorough grace. I firmly believe that if a man can make any woman on earth happy, he is the one." But Edith could not quite restrain a sigh, which disagreed with the words she uttered and seemed to indicate regret rather than hope.

"I love Count de Volmerange," she went on; "I can say that before you, my dear parents, at the moment of going to the altar. The tears I have shed, the sadness in which I have indulged, are no more than the melancholy fit of a nervous child, whose only real grief is that of leaving you."

"So much the better for us, dear Edith. I feared that a secret aversion inspired your tears and your sighs."

"Kiss me, father," said the girl, holding out her brow to Lord Harley, who drew her to his breast. Then she took her mother's hand and bent over it with deep emotion. A few stifled sobs escaped her, but when she raised her face she had resumed her calm expression.

Count de Volmerange was announced.

He was a young fellow of twenty-five or twenty-six, whose handsome face at once attracted by its curious charm. He was born at Chandernagore, of a French father and an Indian mother, and united in himself the qualities of the two races. His eyes, of the purest blue, were shaded by very long black lashes and surmounted by ebony brows clearly marked on a forehead of mat pallor. This contrast imparted a singular grace to his face. The blue glance, showing between the sombre fringes, had a sad, soft tone which the strength of the neighbouring tones prevented from being feminine. When a lively emotion moved him, his eyes, made brighter by the warm tints of the eyelids, seemed to be illumined, and turned from sapphire to turquoise. This discord in tone, agreeable though it was, and which a colourist painter would have studied with love, imparted a fatal and supernatural look to his handsome

face. Some of the dreamy, sinister angels of Albert Dürer have that same glance, vast as the heaven, deep as the sea, in which every form of melancholy seems to have melted into a drop of azure water. Although peace of the soul, frankness and kindness breathed in that face, no artist, having to paint happiness, would have taken it for a model.

Count de Volmerange was tall, and although slight, was endowed with uncommon strength. Though his figure was aristocratically elegant, the breadth of his chest and the muscles of his arms, which showed under the cloth of his sleeves, betokened athletic vigour. His robust nature, improved by the breeding and the perfect style of a gentleman, was possessed of extreme grace, the grace of strength.

The party left for the church, which happened to be that very Church of Saint Margaret in Palace Yard under the porch of which Miss Annabel Vyvyan, pale as an alabaster statue upon a tomb, was awaiting her bridegroom. Edith's veil touched Annabel's shoulder as she passed. As for Volmerange, perfectly happy, he did not even cast a glance at the unhappy girl waiting on the threshold of the church and trying to look into the fog; yet two fates had just passed each other.

Annabel, thinking of no one but Benedict, paid not the least attention to this incident. A prey to her anxiety, embarrassed by her peculiar situation, she did not notice either Edith or Volmerange. No shudder warned them.

Edith and Volmerange entered the dark church, and the ceremony took place to the sound of the gusts of wind which moaned through the shadowy naves and made the doors slam. The fog was turning into rain, and great drops, driven by the wind, struck against the yellow panes of the huge Protestant windows; a pale light, dimmed constantly by the blasts of the tempest, lighted with its sinister gleams the wedding couple, the priest, and the spectators. The surplice looked like a shroud, and the clergyman as livid as a spectre, or a necromancer performing a spell. The sacred gestures were like cabalistic signs, and the kneeling pair seemed rather to be praying on a tomb than to be bending happy and joyous, to receive the marriage blessing. Near the door in the distance was seen a white shape surrounded by black coats, who seemed to be kept to the threshold of the church by an infernal power, like an unhappy soul driven from Paradise by an angel. A feeling of overwhelming sadness filled the spectators; a

vague presentiment of misfortune beat with bat-like wings upon every brow; an icy, penetrating cold which chilled the very marrow within the bones, a cold like that of a cellar, a sepulchre, or a prison, made the guests shudder, and added to the painful impression. The least superstitious, in spite of their incredulity, could not help thinking to themselves: "This is not a very auspicious wedding. If it turns out well, we shall have to confess that happiness has sometimes very sad omens."

The only one who did not feel any of these external impressions was Volmerange. He worshipped Edith, and if the day on which he received her hand in his had been filled with lightning and thunder, clouds and water-spouts, it would have appeared to him pure and serene. What matter the winds of heaven and the fogs of earth, when a man bears sunshine in his heart and the heavens in his soul?

As the couple left the church, a meanly dressed man of humble mien, who might have been taken for a poor beggar or a solicitor speculating upon the happiness which leads a man to make others happy, held out to Count de Volmerange a sealed envelope apparently containing a few papers, — a petition, no doubt,

with certificates in support of it. Volmerange took the envelope with a careless hand and put it in his pocket without looking at the man who proffered it. Edith, at the sight of him, shuddered but said nothing.

It was written above that no marriage should be happily celebrated that day in the Church of Saint Margaret.

Sir Benedict Arundel had disappeared. And towards the middle of the night in the nuptial chamber of Volmerange and Edith, a deep, painful moan had sounded in the silence of the house. Some of the servants had heard it, but no one had dared to seek to penetrate, without being called, into the mysteries of the marriage chamber. Only, the next morning, as no sound was heard in the room, as no ring of the bell was heard and it was already past noon, they ventured to open the door.

The room was empty.

VI

LADY ELEANOR BRAYBROOKE, raging and exasperated, looked apoplectic enough to fill her heirs and collaterals with hope had they seen her at that moment. She was unable to keep still, and formed the greatest contrast to the pallor and motionlessness of Annabel. She was like a red-hot coal by the side of a snowflake, and the wonder was that the nearness of her blazing face did not make Annabel's white one melt.

"I cannot understand it," said Sir William Bawtry. "I cannot even form the most absurd conjecture about this disappearance."

"I can think of a reason," answered the choleric Lady Braybrooke. "Benedict Arundel is the lowest of wretches. But we cannot remain here forever, stuck like statues. Let us return to your home, my niece."

She took Annabel's arm and led her to the carriage.

When Annabel, until then sunk in mute stupor, found herself alone with her aunt, she gave way to a

hysterical fit, her lovely features were contracted, violent sobs broke out, and if abundant tears had not flowed from her eyes, she would have died of grief.

"The loss of fifty thousand Arundels is not worth one of those pearls which flow from your eyes, my darling," said Lady Eleanor, as she tried to calm Miss Vyvyan. "I told you that a well-bred man would not leave his bride at the door of the church to speak to a friend. Sir George Alan Braybrooke would never have indulged in such a piece of rudeness. Who can this Sidney be? The brother, I suppose, of some creature whom that wretch Arundel had seduced, and who was waiting in some neighbouring tavern with her baby in her arms."

"Sidney has no sister, aunt; Sir Benedict told me so several times," replied Annabel to Lady Braybrooke; "so your supposition is unfounded. Besides, Sir Benedict Arundel is incapable —"

"Oh, nonsense! you girls always have excuses for these handsome-whiskered gentlemen, who look at the moon when they talk to you of an evening. Your Benedict was poetical and a poet. I have always detested such people, — one never knows which way to take them. They have unintelligible ways of look-

ing at things, and a sort of reversed logic which makes them do the very thing that no one expects them to do. They imagine absurd happiness, and fancy they are suffering from chimerical misfortunes. What is needed in marriage is a practical mind. Sir George Alan Braybrooke — "

"But, aunt, suppose he has been the victim of a plot. Suppose he has fallen into a trap — "

"Nonsense! a plot in London in broad daylight, a few steps from a file of carriages and a whole crowd of footmen and policemen!"

"If Benedict has not returned, it is because he is dead," replied Annabel, stifling a sigh in her handkerchief, which she had wetted with her tears.

For a few moments the girl was overwhelmed by convulsive sobs.

"Come, come!" said Lady Eleanor, troubled by Annabel's despair. "Because a bridegroom disappears for some more or less mysterious reason, it does not follow that he is no longer on this earth."

"Oh, I am sure, aunt, I shall never see him again. I feel a presentiment that I shall not. He is forever lost to me."

"Oh, nonsense! What do you mean by presenti-

ments? I have never had any. That may do in Scotland, the country of second sight, but in London, in the West End, people do not foresee the future."

"But the church had such a gloomy look; I shuddered as I crossed the threshold."

"That is simply the effect of its age and of coal, a mere Gothic phantasmagoria. If you had chosen the new church at Hanover Square, imitated from the Parthenon and painted white, in which all the best people are married, you would not have felt that prophetic effect, and your future would nevertheless have been the same."

"Your reasoning is cruel, aunt, but I feel that a brutal hand has just blotted on the book of fate the page on which his future life and mine were written."

"But, instead of seeking supernatural explanations, I must say, even if I am to pain you, that there are more plausible motives, — love for another —"

"How can you think so, aunt? In that case, I should prefer that he should be dead. Sir Benedict Arundel is incapable of falsehood and treason. His lips speak what his heart thinks, and his heart is in accord with his eyes. Besides, is it possible to deceive? Then why should he have done it? Has

he not a great name, is he not as rich as I am, and as young?"

"And as handsome, you may add. The two of you formed a lovely couple," added Lady Eleanor Braybrooke, with a sigh; for she could not help acknowledging the accuracy of Annabel's reasoning, and her anger had begun to yield to genuine anxiety. She understood that what she had taken for an impertinence might well be a misfortune. Her complexion, hitherto violet, now became purple, then crimson, and finally red, which was comparatively pale for her.

In the course of a few minutes the carriage drew up at the door, and Miss Annabel Vyvyan walked up alone, sad and despairing, the stairs which an hour before she had descended with joy in her heart, a smile on her lips, and the tip of her white glove in the hand of her well-beloved.

The surprise of her maids was extreme to see her return thus, but Lady Braybrooke's remarks soon made them aware of what had happened, and although, with the reserve of English servants, they did not permit themselves to ask any questions or to say anything about the misfortune which had just befallen their young mistress, it was plain that in the inferior sphere

in which they moved, they shared her great and well-grounded grief; and they showed it by the change in their faces and the careful manner in which they walked about the room for fear of disturbing her. Miss Annabel had thrown herself, half fainting, on a sofa opposite the mirror in which but a moment since she had looked at herself in her wedding-dress. If mirrors, in spite of their inconstancy, had the least feeling for the objects which they reflect without preserving them, this one would have been astonished and touched at reflecting, so pale, so wan, and so despairing, the face that but a few moments before had shone in the depths of its burnished steel so fair, so fresh, so radiant with happiness and hope.

Alas! the pretty tea roses had lost their lovely tints, and scarcely did the lips preserve a rosy touch almost vanished. The living beauty had become a dead beauty, and the statue animated with joy had turned into an angel of melancholy weeping over a tomb.

The wedding bouquet and ornaments, of which Annabel's distracted glance caught a glimpse in the mirror, in their white freshness and their virginal brilliancy, appeared to her an odious irony, a cruel jeer.

"Undress me," she said to her maids. "Of what use are these wretched ornaments? I am no longer a bride, but a widow. Give me a black dress."

"There," cried Lady Eleanor, "is another romantic idea. To wear black, — that is absurd. A brown dress would suffice, for, after all, you are not married. You will compromise yourself, Annabel, and it may hurt you later. Benedict is not the only husband in the world."

"So far as I am concerned, he is the only one."

"You talk like a love-sick girl. No love is irreparable, everything can be made up, and one man is as good as another, — you may believe my long experience," said Lady Eleanor, swelling out as, thanks to the flattering sound of the word "experience" in such matters, she risked the epithet "old" in order to give more fulness to her periods and more authority to her maxim.

On his part, poor William Bawtry, not knowing what to think of so strange an occurrence, was traversing the streets for the twentieth time with the stupid obstinacy which is the result of incomprehensibility. He hoped to find Sir Benedict by dint of going and coming. He entered rapidly the few shops in the lane,

and made the worthy dealers in West Indian goods, the hospitable proprietors of oyster-houses and taverns, repeat till they were tired that they had seen no one pass by resembling the gentleman whose description he gave. The police, on being questioned, said they had seen no passer-by, no group of people at the time when Sir Arundel disappeared; that besides, the fog, so thick at that moment, prevented any one seeing more than three or four yards away; nevertheless, they had heard no sound, no cries, no scuffling, had not noticed the faintest signs of a struggle, and the gentleman whom Sir William was looking for had no doubt gone away of his own accord.

Where could he be sought for in so vast a city as London, without any clue to guide investigators, who, besides, would have to stop at the inviolable threshold of an English home, in case the retreat which concealed him could have been suspected? Nevertheless, Sir William Bawtry went to the police headquarters, where he received a promise that the matter would be inquired into; and he sent through the city some fifty detectives who walked up and down all sorts of unlikely streets, and returned that evening, their shoes visibly worn and with mud up to their necks, without, however, having

found anything that could lead to the discovery of Benedict or Sidney.

While walking towards Miss Annabel Vyvyan's house, for the state of agitation in which he was, made him prefer walking to driving, Sir William Bawtry, in a monologue which the usual phlegm of the English did not prevent his breaking in upon with gestures that would have seemed eccentric if any one in London ever looked at anybody else, asked himself a number of insoluble questions about the event that had happened that morning. "What the devil!" said Sir William to himself. "Although we do deserve to a certain extent the reputation of eccentricity which we enjoy on the continent, my friend Benedict's act goes far beyond the bounds of eccentricity. To drop on the threshold of the church the handsomest girl in the three kingdoms is a savage and abominable act. Benedict was unquestionably madly in love with Miss Annabel. It was no caprice. For the past year he had seen her almost every day, so he had not taken fire unexpectedly. Miss Annabel's soul is as lovely as her body; she is as beautiful within as without. What can have so suddenly turned Benedict against her? Did he at the last moment discover some hidden vice, some concealed offence in her? Yet

in driving to church with me, he seemed radiant with happiness, caressing dreams of the future, and not having the slightest intention of running away. He seemed to be ready to bow very gracefully to the yoke of marriage, and no one could have foreseen that he would so abruptly lay back his ears and bolt like a shy colt. I suppose that at the moment of giving it up, bachelor life appeared to him in the most attractive colours; or Sidney has told him about Miss Annabel one of those terrible things which burn like a red-hot iron and cut like an axe. But what could he have to say about that pure, transparent life spent in a house of glass, every hour of which can be accounted for, and in which slander and calumny could not find the shadow of a pretext? What cool extravagance can Sidney have proposed to him? — a trip to the Arctic, a tiger or black-panther hunt in his Java domains? That would be madness, and Benedict is not mad; and unless Sidney has taken him away with him and put him in his pocket, I can make nothing of it."

At this moment a happy thought occurred to Sir William Bawtry.

"Suppose I were to go to Sidney's house in Pall Mall, the one he lived in before he left for India."

The windows of the house were closed and everything indicated that no one had lived there for a long time. William lifted the knocker, and a servant opened, after having made him wait a long time. The servant, who had come from the farthest recesses of the mansion, testified at the sight of Sir William Bawtry a surprise which proved how rare the appearance of a visitor was in this deserted home.

"Is Sir Arthur Sidney at home just now?" asked Sir William Bawtry, at haphazard.

"Yes, sir, I think so."

"In that case, show me up to him. Here is my card," said Sir William, as he entered.

"Oh! he is not here, but in Calcutta, in Blue Elephant Street, number 25. This is the time at which he was accustomed to come home. Sir Arthur Sidney has been living in India for two years past."

"And has he not returned?"

"Not that I am aware of, sir," answered the servant, still edging Sir William towards the door.

"And yet I have just seen him in a street near Saint Margaret's."

"You must have been deceived by some likeness, sir, for if Sir Arthur were in London, he would have

notified us of his arrival, and no doubt would have come to his own home," answered the servant in a tone of ironical politeness, and closing in Sir William Bawtry's face, whom he evidently took for a swindler, the leaf of the door, —the handle of which he had not let go during the conversation.

Resuming his way, Sir William said to himself: "Either Sidney is really not in London, or that rascal has been drilled to say what he does. And yet I clearly recognised Arthur, and Benedict spoke to him and called him by name. If Benedict had debts, I might suppose it was a sheriff's officer, dressed up like Sir Arthur, to carry him off to a sponging-house. Well, I may perhaps now find him at Miss Annabel's, explaining his remarkable conduct in the most natural fashion possible."

But Sir Benedict was not at his bride's house, and Lady Braybrooke, seeing the girl's dreadful despair, tried to prove to her that nothing was more natural for a man than to disappear just as he was about to be married, and that Sir George Alan Braybrooke, who was the best bred of men, would have been equally facetious.

If Benedict himself did not appear, he might at least

have written; but there was no letter, no note, nothing to explain his strange conduct.

The investigations of the police were fruitless; the fate of Benedict Arundel remained sunk in the most mysterious secrecy. It was difficult to believe that he had been murdered, since Sidney, who had been brought up at Harrow with Benedict, was his intimate friend and had no motive of enmity towards him. As for his being carried off and imprisoned, what could be the purpose, what could be the motive? It could not be jealousy of a rejected lover, for Sidney had never seen Miss Annabel, and there could be no rivalry between him and Benedict.

As evening came on, the poor bride returned to her maiden chamber, the threshold of which she thought that morning she had crossed for the last time. Her maids undressed her and laid her like a dead body in the pretty white nest over which had fluttered so many happy dreams, waving their rosy wings over the ivory brow of the young girl. She remained in the same position in which she had been put, her head sunk in her hair, which flowed like the water from a river urn, her pale face resting on her arm. She might have been thought dead but that, from time to time,

a tear rolled over her pale cheeks like a pearl over marble.

"Good-bye, my dear child," said Lady Eleanor Braybrooke, seeing that her niece remained obstinately mute. "Keep up your heart."

A faint gesture of hopelessness made Annabel's shoulders move, for she was absolutely convinced that Benedict, not having returned at once, would never reappear again. Not for one moment had she believed in treachery on his part. She felt that she was beloved by him, whether absent or present, in this life or in the next. She had the unshakable faith of first love. Thus she wept all night silently, until the heavy sleep of morning weighed down upon her reddened eyelids; but her dreams were as sad as her thoughts, for time and again tears escaped from her closed eyes. And thus was spent the wedding night of the young girl who should have been Lady Arundel.

Lord Harley and his wife, overcome with grief, were on their part making equal efforts to discover their lost daughter and son-in-law.

The bed seemed not to have been slept in, the tapers had burned quietly down to the frills. On the table a crushed paper, burned at the flame of one of

the tapers, had preserved its shape, represented by black ashes. On the floor lay the envelope, addressed to the Count de Volmerange, without a stamp, and evidently addressed in a disguised hand. Lord Harley studied intently that shadow of a letter which the least breath caused to flutter, and which contained perhaps the secret of the irritating mystery of the flight of Edith and Volmerange. He tried in vain to make out on the fine calcined pellicle the few traces of letters which the fire had not caused to disappear, but he might just as well have attempted to decipher hieroglyphs, and worn hieroglyphs at that. The burned paper gave no information, and yet it was evident that it had played an important and decisive part on that fatal night; the very care taken to destroy it testified to its value.

The great glass door opening on the terrace had been opened and a careful inspection of the sanded walks showed a few faint footprints of a small, well-shaped woman's-foot, for the toe and the heel alone had marked the damp ground. Others, larger and deeper, mixed with these. All ended at the terrace which rose at the end of the garden above the street. That way Edith and Volmerange must have gone.

From the terrace to the ground was a height of some six or seven feet. How had they managed to get down, and how could this amazing flight be explained? A young married couple to leave their nuptial chamber on their wedding night as if they were culprits, without a word of explanation, plunging a father and mother in the most dreadful despair, was something terrible.

Lady Harley recalled Edith's sad and preoccupied looks on the days preceding the marriage, and supposed that she was the victim of some disappointed love. But Edith had sworn that her heart was free, and that Volmerange was the husband of her choice. To explain the matter by a rape or a crime was no explanation, for there were no prints of footsteps from the terrace to the glass door, the road which malefactors would have necessarily taken. The ground, wetted by the night tempest, would have preserved these traces as faithfully as the footprints of Edith and Volmerange.

A bit of muslin caught on one of the iron spikes placed upon the coping of the walls pointed out the way by which the young wife had sprung into the street. Unfortunately the pavement, muddy and

covered with pools of water, had preserved no trace of the fugitives. The storm had caused the streets to be deserted early, and no one had seen anything.

"Perhaps," said Lord Harley, "they have gone to their Twickenham estate. And yet Volmerange did say that he could not understand the foolishness of burying one's happiness within a postchaise, and turning postilions into confidants of true love. Still, let us send a messenger to Twickenham."

The Count and the Countess had not appeared there, and the housekeeper had received no orders from them.

The reply plunged Lord and Lady Harley into the deepest grief. During the time the messenger had been gone, they had managed to prove to themselves that their daughter had gone to Twickenham; they had clung to that vain hope so desperately that when it escaped them like a tuft of fennel, they rolled into an abyss of misery, and thought they had lost their daughter for the second time.

The most careful search failed to bring about any result, and the disappearance of the married pair remained shrouded in mystery. The dark Church of Saint Margaret had indeed realised the sad presenti-

ments inspired by its austere and funereal aspect, and justified Lady Braybrooke's preference for the new church in Hanover Square as far as weddings went. This time the good lady was not wrong when she maintained that Gothic churches were good only to be buried in.

VII

WELL, Sidney, what is the important matter you have come to tell me about?" said Benedict Arundel to his friend, as he stepped into the narrow lane which the shadow of the church and the fog together made as black as a corridor of hell.

"It will not take long," answered Sidney, as he took Benedict by the arm and brought him nearly opposite the house described in the preceding chapter, as if he were not yet sufficiently far from the wedding company to tell his secret.

Just at this moment a dray drawn by four of those huge horses to be seen only in London, and which, with their gray coats and their colossal form, look like young elephants, entered the lane, which it filled almost completely from one end to the other. The driver, who was at the head of the horses, was the aforesaid ingenious Cuddy. The dray, thus driven, formed a moving barricade which completely stopped up the

street. It prevented Benedict from retracing his steps and also people from coming to his help. On account of the enormous load, the dray proceeded very slowly, and had not yet passed the third or fourth house in the street. Saunders was crawling along the wall near Benedict, and in his hand, hanging at his side, was the mask to which Noll had made anacreontic allusions, supposing it intended for Nancy's pretty face. As for Noll, who aimed at being a man of the world, — a pretension which in his opinion was justified by a silver pin set with imitation turquoises representing the harp of Erin and stuck in a black satin rag, and especially by a pair of gloves of indescribable colour which might have been white at some remote time, and through the finger-ends of which passed red knuckles and blue nails, — Noll was gracefully dawdling, chewing an unlighted cigar and caressing the bone of his stork-like leg with a small switch used for beating clothes, and which he carried as if it were a riding-whip. Bob, true to his character, was spelling out on the sign of a low drinking-shop the pompous and very deceitful list of French wines and foreign liquors. He preferred this sort of literature to all the poetry on earth; Shakespeare and Milton were in his eyes only wretched

scribblers by the side of the letter-painter who had written this superb list, much more lyrical than Pindar's odes, — a Greek whom Bob would have assuredly despised because he wrote a stanza beginning thus:

"Water, in truth, is very good."

When Sidney, followed by Benedict, passed near Saunders, he winked at him almost imperceptibly. Saunders understood and drew near Benedict. Noll let fall his stick and bent, pretending to pick it up, and Bob, who had got so far as "Cognac, Arrack, Rum, and Tafia," dragged himself away from his intoxicating reading. Cuddy left his horses, which quietly stopped, and drew nearer the group. At the same moment Benedict felt slapped in his face and spread over his features a thick, warm, heavy mask which at once deprived him of sight, breathing, and speech; a strong arm was pressed against his loins like an iron bar; broad bony hands, with fingers like crabs' claws, caught his legs and raised him from the ground. It was all done in a flash, and Benedict, whose arms were held by human fetters so that he could not get rid of his mask, felt himself carried off towards some unknown place by a mysterious force, as in those horrible dreams in which Smarra carries you off upon its monstrous back.

The door of the deserted house opened as if by magic, and the band entered the dark passage, followed by Sir Arthur Sidney. When they had got sufficiently far into the narrow corridor, so that the light coming from the street had completely vanished, Saunders wisely bethought himself that it was not necessary to stifle the gentleman, and cleverly pulled off the pitch mask which covered Benedict's face. He was just swooning away, and the mad efforts he had made to free himself had greatly diminished. He was tortured by inexpressible anxiety, the blood was surging in his temples, his breast heaved as if breathing were an impossibility, his ears sang violently, and his blinded eyes saw passing before them fantastic blue, green, and red lights.

Assuredly the atmosphere in that dark, fetid, icy-cold passage would at any other time have turned Benedict sick; but never was an Alpine breeze, untainted by any human breath and laden with all the scent of flowery solitudes, inspired by more eager lungs than that almost mephitic air. That breath of tainted air was life to Benedict. The immense relief he felt was manifested by a deep sigh and a prolonged "Thank God!"

"It looks," said Noll, to himself, "as if the gentleman began to feel the need of putting his nose out of the window, and although Bob maintains there is nothing better than a drink of whiskey, I think the gentleman would have preferred a breath of air."

Benedict, now realizing his situation, attempted to resist, but eight vigorous arms drove him into the room I have described, and which the crew of the yawl, who had now returned to their boat by the subterranean passage, had left empty. The door was closed upon him, and the key turned sharply in the lock. Still overcome by weakness, Benedict sank upon a box and leaned in an attitude of despair on the table covered with glasses and jugs, the remains of the orgy Noll and Saunders had shared in.

Strange was the transition, stranger still the turn in his fate. But a few minutes since, Sir Benedict Arundel was sitting in a comfortable carriage opposite a lovely girl, a fair angel that had come from heaven for him, surrounded by his friends and his acquaintances, in the midst of a brilliant, aristocratic company, so high placed that it seemed impossible for misfortune to touch any of its members. And yet, by an unheard-of treachery, a perfidious trick, he was now a prisoner in a

horrible den where no doubt a dreadful death awaited him.

He gazed with lack-lustre eye at the red glow of the coal fire that was slowly dying out, at the blood-red walls reeking with crime and vice, on which gallows, portraits of murderers and robbers, scenes of blood and debauch, scratched in white outlines, mingled in a sinister saraband with obscene, enigmatical, or threatening inscriptions, in the intermittent light of the fire.

The very elegance of Benedict's dress made the contrast still more striking. His perfumed, clean, white glove resting upon the coarse wooden table cut by knives and shining with grease, produced a most painful impression. Such a man as Benedict could be in such a place only as the result of a mysterious and wicked plot.

Somewhat recovered from the shock of the sudden blow, Benedict asked himself what could be the object of this strange sequestration. Had Sir Arthur Sidney wished to deliver him over to evil-doers, to assassins perhaps? Was it an eccentric way of punishing him for not awaiting his arrival? Had Sir Arthur planned this kidnapping, or, being himself a powerless spectator, had he hastened for help in the unequal struggle? Sir

Benedict passed from conjecture to conjecture without being able to fathom the mystery.

Then he thought with despair of the mortal anxiety and the painful situation of Miss Annabel on not seeing return the man she had chosen for her husband, and whose disappearance would remain inexplicable. The thought maddened him. He cursed Sidney, and raged round the room with the mechanical obstinacy of a wild beast seeking an outlet. Several times he tried to break down the door, but it was firm on its rusty old hinges, and Benedict's fiercest blows had no effect upon the thick boards. The window, placed at an inaccessible height, was further guarded with flat iron bars with serrated edges placed so closely together that a sylph could not have slipped between them without tearing its wings.

In the hope of being heard in some of the neighbouring houses, the queer angles of whose roofs showed faintly through the upper panes, Sir Benedict shouted with all his might. In order to make the sound carry farther, he endeavoured to imitate the calls of sailors in a gale of wind and of mountaineers who signal to each other from the two sides of a precipice separated by a torrent, but the room was as mute as if it had been

padded; Benedict's voice awoke no echo, and came back to him as it does on high summits where the rarefied air stills the vibrations of words.

Maddened, Benedict passed from cries to howls, and a bloody foam rose to his lips. Then, weary and ashamed of his useless attempts, he let himself fall upon the bench. The coals, almost entirely consumed, gave out an occasional flicker only; a tiny violet flame meandered, ready to vanish, over the heaps of ashes. Night, which had fallen, made the window dark, and formidable shadows grew in the corner of the room, in which the eye of terror could easily have perceived the motions of monstrous swarming forms.

Sir Benedict was unquestionably a brave man, but to the fury and despair of being separated from Annabel was added the instinct of personal preservation very properly awaking in him. His strange and dark adventure was well calculated to inspire apprehension in the most courageous mind. Imprisoned, alone, unarmed, defenceless, in a padded, mute chamber, the door of which was perhaps about to give passage to murderers, Benedict fell into the deepest discouragement. Another still more terrible fear assailed him.

Suppose the murderers should not come! Suppose he were to be abandoned in that hideous room, a wretched oubliette used by ignoble assassins! The thought of dying there of thirst and hunger like a mad dog, far from light and men, presented itself so vividly to his mind that a cold sweat broke out on his forehead. He would have welcomed an assassin standing on the threshold of the open door as a delivering angel, for it would have been swift death without torture, instead of a hideous agony more frightful even than that of Ugolino, for the latter had at least his seven sons to eat.

He strode up and down the room, seeking an issue, sounding the walls, but there was no other door than that which he had vainly tried to break down; or if there were, it was so skilfully masked that he could not discover it. Besides, even if he had found it out, of what use would it have been? It was no doubt closed by some secret or complicated lock, the key of which would certainly have been taken away.

In the paroxysms of his despair Benedict cursed God and man. He shook his fist at the dark ceiling, for lack of the vault of heaven, and stamped violently upon the floor, unable to strike more directly the face of

step-mother Cybele. The floor gave out a dull, hollow sound, for Benedict happened to stamp right over the trap I have spoken of.

Great joy filled his heart as he heard his steps sounding over the void. The hope of escape immediately gave him back his energy and his coolness. He knelt down, and feeling the floor with his hands, searched in every direction for the ring, knob, or spring that would cause the trap to fly open. He soon found the ring, and with a mighty effort succeeded in lifting up the heavy door.

The air of the underground passage struck his face, and the abyss showed vaguely before him, more sombre than obscurity and darker than night. Whither led the opening? Was it the commencement of an underground passage, or a well into which the bodies of victims were thrown? Was it the receptacle where a company of Burkers kept the bodies of their victims? Would he stumble over heaped-up bones, or upon the laden tables of a clandestine morgue? Perhaps some eccentric physician wished to indulge in the anatomical amusement of dissecting a gentleman's body and using the scalpel upon the fibres of an aristocrat, and his purveyors, considering Benedict a suitable subject, had

seized him to sell him for a sufficient number of guineas to this dilettante doctor.

But it was impossible to admit that Sidney, his childhood's friend, his chum at Harrow, was playing a part in this awful conspiracy, and the most horrible part of all, that of the tame ox which leads the wild bull to the arena or the slaughter-house.

By putting out his arm Benedict felt the top step of a stair, and like all brave men he preferred to meet death rather than await it in stupid gloom. He slipped through the opening of the trap, which he had been unable to throw back on account of its weight, and put out his arm to support the trap-door, though it trembled and almost gave way. Then, thinking that he had gone down enough steps for the trap not to smash his skull as it closed, he bent down his head and took away his hand. The trap-door, left to itself, fell with a lugubrious sound like the cover of a coffin which falls upon the dead. The obscure entrance to the subterranean passage made the sound still more sinister and lamentable. Brave though Benedict was, he felt chilled to the very marrow, and said to himself: "If a man can hear, when his body is sewn up in the shroud, the sound of the earth falling upon the coffin cannot be

more dreadful and lugubrious. Perhaps I have buried myself alive and this black hole is to be my tomb."

He continued, nevertheless, to descend the steps, going down carefully, his hands outstretched.

"I only hope that this passage has an opening, even if it does lead me into a company of bandits, or into a sabbath of witches," said poor Benedict, almost regretting the blood-red chamber.

In the deep darkness there was no light, not even a livid one, no star, not even a bloody one; no ray of light in the interstices of the planks; nothing but deep, cold, dreadful night. The unfortunate young man seemed to have passed from the first to the second room of his tomb. The wind, blowing under the damp vault, moaned like a human voice, a sound with which nature on stormy nights seems to deplore unknown losses; vague lamentations, stifled sighs, sobs apparently escaping from a breaking heart, the howls of victims pressed by the murderer's knee, the organ of the tempest played for the wan auditor, groping in the shadow, its whole symphony of sadness and terror.

As he descended, the steps became damp and slippery, and a fine mist driven by the wind struck his

face. The low lipping of water could be heard through the gusts, and the spume of a wave, breaking higher up than the others, wetted his feet. He came to the conclusion that the passageway led to the Thames, and as he might have rivalled Lord Byron as a swimmer, he believed his escape certain. Indeed nothing could be easier for a swimmer such as he was than to reach the opening of the archway on the river and then ascend or descend towards the shore according to the place where he would find himself. Cheered by this hope, he fancied himself already seated by Annabel telling her of his strange adventure, and begging her to forgive him the anxiety which he had most involuntarily caused her. With the incredible speed characteristic of thought, which is a fluid as swift, or even swifter than electricity, innumerable lovely pictures passed through his mind during the short space of time it took him to go down three steps. He saw himself before the altar, pressing Miss Annabel Vyvyan's delicate hand, then on the threshold of the nuptial chamber, and, in a still more distant picture, in his country seat at Richmond. He was standing by Annabel's side under the veranda at the top of the marble steps, watching a lovely, fair-

haired child playing upon the green sward with a tame deer.

His beautiful dreams vanished suddenly and were replaced by the vision and the hallucination of despair. His outstretched hand had struck against an iron grating. The road was barred on this side, and on the other return was impossible. Arundel's exhausted strength could never have sufficed to raise the heavy trap-door.

"What have I done, O God, to be damned alive?" he cried sorrowfully. "What unknown crime am I to expiate here? Oh, Annabel! however sad the suppositions in which you are now doubtless indulging as to my fate, they are far from approaching the reality." And by a last effort of ever-springing hope, which never abandons man, and which abides with the victim even when his neck is under the knife, Benedict shook each one of the bars, one after another, trying to move or to draw them away; but they were fastened firmly, and rust had soldered the joints. A score of times, having found the lock, poor Benedict tore his fingers as he attempted to unscrew it or to shoot back the bolt. While he indulged in this useless attempt, for the massive and complicated lock would

have done honour to the door of one of the Newgate cells, a wave lapped him with its icy-cold caress. Benedict, chilled, his teeth chattering, his wedding garments wetted, ascended a few steps to avoid the water, and sat down like one of the sombre, crouching figures which Dante Alighieri has placed upon the steps of his Hell. He remained there with the gloomy resignation of the wild beast at bay, of the savage taken prisoner, — how long he knew not, whether it was an eternity or an hour only. He had no longer a clear perception of things, and the wheels of madness were beginning to whirl in his head.

During a moment of comparative calm, he thought he would like to know the hour, remembering that he had his repeater in his pocket; but his hand, chilled by cold, pressed the spring too strongly or unskilfully. It broke and sounded stridently under the gold of the case. Poor Benedict was in the position of those prisoners in the Siberian mines who are made to work for two hours and then sleep for two hours, in order that they may not know how much time they have left; for although they never see the sun, the division of work and rest would allow them to count. To await death in darkness without knowing

the time, — what a torture! one which Satan has forgotten.

Soon nothing was heard under the vault save the low sound made by the yawl, as it rose and fell on the tide, and bumped against the wall of the subterranean canal.

VIII

AFTER a time which seemed eternal to Sir Arundel, but which in reality was not much more than an hour, — for time does not exist, and despair or weariness may make a minute seem an age, — a dull sound of steps was heard above the vault, and some rays of light showed the place where lay the trap-door. Soon the heavy door was lifted, a livid, flickering ray fell in the damp obscurity, and through the narrow opening showed, by the side of a candle, Saunders' characteristic face.

Arundel hastily ascended the steps, and though he was bold as the brave knights from whom he was descended, it was not without a real feeling of pleasure that he saw Saunders' head at the top of the stairs. A winged cherub would not have seemed lovelier to him, and yet there was nothing celestial about Saunders. But Arundel felt at the sight of him the same joy as a man buried alive, who sees the tombstone lifted up, and to whom the hideous

Shakespearean grave-digger is a bright angel of light. Although the hero of a novel should never be susceptible to any emotions except love, it is uncommonly unpleasant to die of cold and starvation in a frock coat, white gloves and patent-leather boots, in an icy cave on a stair washed by the tide, on the day of one's own wedding with one of the loveliest heiresses in London.

"Where the devil has he got to?" murmured Saunders, before the ray of the candle fell upon Arundel in the darkness. "I am quite sure I double locked the grating, and the bars are close enough to each other for the finest gentleman, even if he wore a woman's corset, to find it impossible to get through. He is bound to be either in the room or in the passageway. Well, I'll go down and explore for myself."

Scarcely had Saunders set foot upon the upper steps when he found himself face to face with Arundel, who was hastily coming up.

"Oh! there you are, sir," said the sailor with an air of rough cordiality and visible satisfaction. "You found the second room of your apartment somewhat cold and damp, did n't you? You regretted the first." And with his rough hand, he supported

Sir Benedict Arundel, who was staggering on the edge of the trap.

Benedict let himself fall on the bench near the table. Saunders poked up the half-burned coal and made it flame again. Arundel, revived by the warm air of the room, and assured at least of not dying without explanation, actually thought the horrible den with its queer, sinister drawings almost pleasant, and experienced comparative comfort. Saunders' face, though rough, was not malevolent, and Benedict attempted to draw him into conversation.

"What is the meaning," he said, "of this absurd kidnapping? Do you intend to rob me, to have me sign drafts, or to murder me?"

Saunders shook his head and answered, "I think, on the contrary, that if you needed money, sir, it would be given you."

"Then what do you want to do with me?"

"I don't know, but nothing to harm you, for on the contrary I have been told to take the greatest care of you, and you will be treated as carefully as a case of clocks or Bohemian glass."

"Do you know the man by whom I was walking in the lane, Sir Arthur Sidney?"

"I saw him to-day for the first time," answered Saunders, whose steel-blue eyes steadily sustained Sir Benedict's penetrating glance.

"Then Sidney has nothing to do with this abominable conspiracy," said Benedict to himself, happy at being able to dismiss a suspicion which had painfully weighed on his mind. "But how is it that, being so close to me, he did not assist me and did not call for help?" he thought, as doubt again recurred to him.

"What induced you to do this?" continued Arundel; "you would be severely punished if the law got hold of you."

"I obeyed the orders of those whom I promised to obey, and as for the law —" Saunders shrugged his shoulders significantly, by way of inferring that he was uncommonly sceptical with regard to the perspicacity of the police.

"And who are the people whom you obey in such venturesome enterprises?"

"If I were to tell you their names, you would be no wiser. You have never had anything to do with them."

"Well, do you know who I am?"

"No. I know neither your name nor your title.

Only I can tell by your aristocratic face, your small hands, and the quality of your clothes and linen, that you belong to the aristocracy."

"If you will open that door to me and take me back to the street, I am rich enough to secure you a small competence which would enable you to live as you please in the country you prefer."

On hearing this proposal, Saunders' tanned face turned brick red, and his sea-blue eyes sparkled in his face, which had become sombre. He quickly recovered himself, and quietly replied: "Although the business I am in is not a very clean one, I am not in the habit of betraying those who have trusted me, even when it is an ugly piece of business. Besides, even if I were willing to set you at liberty in return for your gold, I could not do it. The door is locked outside, and I am as much a prisoner as you are."

A moment of silence followed this reply. Then Saunders, whose face had resumed its natural colour, opened a closet in the wall and drew from it a piece of salt beef, some bread, and a pewter of beer, which he placed upon the table beside Arundel, saying with a respectfully jovial look: "You must have breakfasted early this morning, sir; I fancy you did not have any

luncheon, and it is long past the dinner hour. However troubled you may be, nature does not lose its rights, and though your heart is filled with grief, you may not be sorry to eat something."

In spite of his despair and his anger, Arundel, or at least the physical part of him, recognised the soundness of the reasoning, drew near the food provided by Saunders, and began to eat, with grief, but with a fairly good appetite.

"The meat is not very delicate," said Saunders, "yet that salt beef was cut from the haunch of one of the best Lancashire beeves, and this beer, darker than pitch and topped by golden froth, is double stout, the best brewed in Dublin with barley and hops, such as you cannot match in the most famous London tavern."

Benedict acknowledged the truth of Saunders' remarks as he cut several slices of the beef thus praised, and drained to the dregs the pewter pot.

IX

SIR BENEDICT ARUNDEL'S frugal repast was scarcely ended, when the trap-door opened and the four fellows whose appearance from underground I have already described, issued slowly from below. One of them exchanged a few words with Saunders in a strange tongue, which Benedict could not understand. The sentences appeared to be composed of a single word, as in idioms which one does not know. It was Gaelic, with, to make it more difficult to understand, a certain number of slang words.

Two of the new-comers approached the trap, and Saunders, advancing towards Sir Benedict Arundel, said to him: "If you will be kind enough to follow us, sir, — it is time to start."

"To start!" cried Arundel, withdrawing instinctively from the trap.

"I hope, sir," said Saunders, politely, "you will understand that it is better to come with us willingly. There are five of us, able-bodied, every one armed, so

that it is no use to make a fight. It is our business to carry out the orders we have received; if need be, we shall use force, — as little as necessary, for we do not wish to harm you."

"I will follow you," answered Arundel, seeing that it was hopeless to do anything else, and thinking to himself that he would have a chance to escape once he got outside.

The company disappeared down the black opening, Saunders going last, leading Benedict, resigned to his fate for the time being. They went down some twenty steps, and reached the grating which had stopped Arundel's escape. There Saunders said to him: —

"I shall be obliged to gag you, sir, though I should be very sorry to do so, unless you will give me your word of honour not to shout and not to call for help. I do not care to muzzle you like a calf crying for its mother."

As the result would be the same in either case, whether he were gagged or gave his word, Arundel promised to keep silence.

"I will not ask you not to try to escape; that is my business," said Saunders, putting the gag back

into his pocket, and taking out the key to open the grating.

One of the sailors held the lantern up, and the key, having been put into the lock rusted by the damp, would have turned with difficulty in a hand less vigorous than that of Saunders. He turned it three times, and the heavy gate, pushed by two of the sailors, grated on its hinges with a harsh sound. The men sat down on their thwarts and placed their sweeps on the gunwale of the yawl with perfect symmetry, waiting orders. Saunders seated himself in the stern-sheets with Benedict by his side. Just as the boat, impelled forward by the oars, was starting, a stray gleam of the lantern showed for a moment in the bow a sombre figure enveloped in a cloak cast over the shoulder, and wearing a hat pulled down over his eyes; but Saunders blew out the lantern, and everything was dark again.

In the course of a few moments the boat issued from the sombre canal on to the waters of the Thames. The fog, blown away by the wind, was vanishing in rags like pieces of stuff carried off by the tempest. The heavens were low, gloomy, and black like the vault of a tomb filled with the smoke of the visitors' torches. The sinister dome, in which lighter veins

represented cracks, seemed about to fall in great blocks upon the sleeping town, the dentellated ebony silhouette of which on either side of the river was studded with only occasional dots of light. The night was a horrible one.

A heavy sea was running. The cables of the ships drew taut with painful creakings like those of the muscles of a patient stretched on the rack; boats collided with lugubrious sounds, and the heavy water fell back on itself with a sigh of oppression and exhaustion, like that which issues from a chest oppressed by the nightmare. The wind uttered moans like the cries of a child murdered by witches in their nameless work, and over the maze of plaintive, indefinable, and sinister sounds, soared like the low rumble of thunder the distant moaning of the waves returning to their homes.

The buildings along the river — stores, warehouses, works with tall obelisks blue with flames, landing-places with broad steps, churches raising above the houses their great Norman towers or their pseudo-classic campaniles — lost in the shadow the mean appearance they had in daylight, and assumed cyclopæan and colossal proportions. The roofs became oriental terraces, the chimney-pots obelisks and lighthouses,

the gigantic sign of open-work letters looked like the traceried balustrade of an aerial balcony; the whole place, sombre, immense, and vague, seemed a Nineveh over which was passing the cloud of the wrath of God. A mezzotint engraver would have made of it, with a few gleams of livid light, one of those terrific Biblical pictures in which the English excel.

Sir Benedict Arundel, seeing the boat passing fairly near to the shore, and feeling the hand with which Saunders grasped his arm as with an iron ring somewhat less close, thought he had a chance to deceive his keeper, and made such an abrupt jump that the boat nearly upset. He was almost over the gunwale, his feet were touching the water, and a few strokes alone separated him from the shore; but Saunders' vigorous grasp, clutching him like pincers, brought him back to his seat, and with a mighty push compelled him to keep down. During this episode, as rapid as thought, the stranger, motionless and silent in the bows, had risen, stretching out his hands as if to help Saunders, for the four rowers had all they could do to keep the boat on an even keel in the swirl of the tide. As the stranger moved, the folds of his cloak fell aside, and Benedict thought he recognised the face of his friend

Sidney, but the man drew his cloak over his shoulder so that the upper portion of it concealed his face, while his eyes were hidden in the shadow projected by the broad-brimmed hat; his identity had again become impenetrable.

Meanwhile the gale increased. The furious wind seemed to take filaments of rain and shoot them hissing from its bow like icy arrows. The dense spray filled the air, and the foam of the waves, blown in patches, scattered sparkling through the darkness. The sea was so heavy that it often rose over the gunwale, and the rowers, their feet braced against the stretchers, their bodies bent back, and tugging away with all their might at the oars, had the greatest difficulty in keeping the boat straight.

Concealed between two great waves, the yawl passed unperceived before the police station, the red lamp of which seemed half asleep, like the eyes of a drunkard.

"It is blowing fit to take your hair off," murmured Saunders; and seeing that Benedict was shivering in his thin black coat, he threw over him a coarse cloak which he picked up with his feet from the bottom of the boat. "One thing is sure," he went on, "in this weather we shall not meet many boats on the Thames.

The weather favours us, — a little too much, perhaps," he added, as he was struck in the face by the spray of a breaking wave.

The passage under the bridges was particularly terrifying. The water rolled under the arches in sombre cataracts with a terrifying noise and fearful spraying; the wind, which was blowing in the opposite direction, opposed, though it could not stop, the wild rush of the waves, which whirled in eddies and were maddened by this resistance in the narrow passage between the piles, which caused their mass to bound back. The wind howled, the water hissed and roared, and the damp echoes of the arches repeated these noises and made them more frightful still.

The boat, steered with miraculous tact and almost inconceivable perspicacity in the deep night, shot safely through the centre of the safest arch and then issued on the other side, dainty, coquettish, and proud, as it had certainly the right to be.

As it was passing Blackfriars Bridge, a white shape, falling from above, shot rapidly past the axis of the arch and fell in the water like swan's-down a short distance from the boat. The swan's-down struggled, and the two arms of a woman showed above the skirt bal-

looned by the fall. When the yawl, carried along, passed near the pale phantom floating on the black waters like an elf or a nixie of the German legends, two desperate hands grasped the gunwale with such nervous vigour, though they were weak and delicate, that the nails sank into the wood like iron claws. If any one in the boat had thought of looking up, and especially if the night had been less dark, he might have caught a glimpse of a human form bending over the parapet of the bridge.

The boat heeled over suddenly, shipped a sea, and would have capsized had the men not immediately leaned over to the other side. A terrified face, so pale that it was visible even in the darkness, rose above the edge of the boat amid soaking hair; the two dilated eyes shone like globules of burnished silver, and the purple lips spoke these words in inexpressible accents:

"Save me! save me!"

"What 's to be done?" cried Saunders. "If she goes on like that she will upset us or stop our way; and yet it would be hard to cut off her hands, though there is no other way to make her let go, and duck her again in that ugly black water which so frightens her."

"That would be an abominable crime," said Bene-

dict, as he seized the unfortunate woman's arms and tried to pull her into the boat.

The men moved over to the other side, and as the mysterious individual in the bows said nothing, Saunders helped Benedict, and soon the woman, having been helped into the yawl, sat down, or rather sank, at Benedict's feet.

The boat's speed, retarded for a moment by this incident, was increased to make up for lost time; London Bridge was soon left behind, and the yawl flew faster than an arrow among the lines of vessels, the yards of which creaked with a mournful sound, while the blocks shrieked like night birds.

A deep silence reigned in the boat; the men seemed to hold their breath; the muffled oars struck the water quietly, as if it were a mist, and the only sound heard was the chattering of the teeth of the poor woman, shivering in her wet garments.

They at last emerged from the great city of ships that lies between London Bridge and the Isle of Dogs, and the oarsmen pulled harder and less carefully in a less turbulent seaway, for the fury of the storm was now somewhat spent.

Benedict, who had stretched a portion of the over-

coat Saunders had lent him over the shoulders of the unfortunate young woman, — who had nothing on but a white muslin dress, — did not suspect that he had seen her already once that day, under the porch of Saint Margaret's, where his coat-sleeve had brushed against her lace veil; and surely poor Edith Harley, for she it was, was far from supposing that the man at whose feet she was sobbing convulsively on this icy-cold night was the unfortunate Benedict Arundel.

A strange destiny had brought together in this frail boat, in the midst of the storm, a wifeless husband and a husbandless wife; a capricious will, parting couples that seemed so well made for each other, had formed a new combination out of the broken and disjoined pieces.

X

THE boat proceeded some distance further, until it was nearly opposite Gravesend. The tempest had calmed down, and the sky, though still threatening, allowed a few stars to show in the dark blue of night, through broader openings in the clouds. The sea, moved to its very depths, was still running heavily, and breaking upon the shores of the river, which here broadened out into an estuary. The wind roared in the distance like a snarling, cowardly dog that has been kicked.

A black hull, surmounted by light spars, seemed to emerge from the water, and showed faintly in the dark; it was the "Lovely Jenny" at anchor. She had been masked till then by a turn in the river. Every one on board appeared to be sound asleep; the hatches were carefully closed; not a light was visible; nothing was heard but the creaking of the blocks and the last blasts of the storm. Such a silence was too deep to be natural; in fact, the "Lovely Jenny" slept with one

eye open, for the yawl had no sooner come within hail than a head showed above the rail, and bending towards the stream, called out in a low but distinct voice, "Hello! ahoy, is that you?"

"Yes," replied Saunders, in the same careful way, "and here is the watchword: Crabs walk backwards, but they reach their destination."

"That is a wise maxim," added Macgill, as he showed at the top of the side-ladder.

The boat had come alongside the "Lovely Jenny," and Saunders, still holding Arundel's arm with one hand, with the other seized one of the side lines, and began to ascend the ladder. Arundel thought for a moment of letting himself fall, but Saunders' hand held him like a vice; and besides, the other men who were coming up had their hands within reach of his feet, and would no doubt have held him back. Then he might also have fallen into the boat below.

Any attempt at escape being therefore impossible, he continued to ascend as slowly as if he were going up to the gallows, for he felt that every step he took separated him still further from Annabel. The way he was being transferred, with so much precaution and mystery, to a vessel that seemed to be waiting for him,

proved that the plan had long been laid. All these silent agents were obeying a will whose purpose he could not fathom. What did they propose to do with him? To carry him to some distant place, to keep him in return for a ransom to be exacted from his parents or his friends? Was he a victim, in London itself, of a band of brigands such as those who carry their prisoners away into the mountains, and then send to the city one of the ears of their prisoner, by way of hastening payment?

After having intrusted Sir Benedict Arundel to Jack and Macgill, Saunders went down into the boat again. "What are we to do with the woman?" he asked of the man with the cloak, still seated in the bows; "it would be pretty hard to throw her overboard again, after having saved her life."

"Take her up on deck," sharply returned the man wrapped up in the mantle.

Edith had listened to this conversation, which was to decide her fate, as if she were wholly unconcerned in it. She was shivering all over, and delirium was already attacking her brain. A prey to the daze of fever, she allowed herself to be taken up and carried away like a sick child by its nurse. Saunders, accus-

tomed to heavier burdens, climbed the ladder as nimbly as a cat, and soon reached the deck with Miss Edith, whom he placed against the mast, for she could scarcely stand; her limp limbs, no longer guided by her will, refused to perform their office. The man with the mantle ordered Saunders to take her below, where she could neither see nor be seen.

The order was at once carried out, and the deck of the "Lovely Jenny," once more deserted, sounded only under the steps of the man with the mantle, who walked up and down the quarter-deck, noting the veering of the wind. Benedict had also been at once led into the main cabin, by Jack and Macgill, and carefully locked up in his new prison.

The cabin was adorned with much elegance: the bed, concealed by damask curtains was of mahogany; a black horsehair sofa, a swinging table, and a small lamp hanging from the ceiling, — formed the furniture. But the port, as Benedict immediately discovered, was formed of a round piece of ground glass, carefully fitted, and so thick as to neither allow any one to look out nor to give any hope of escaping that way. The door appeared to be as carefully closed.

Seeing that any attempt at flight was useless, Arundel

sat down on the sofa, and remained there sunk into something approaching insensibility, enduring his fate with the dull patience of a savage or a captive wild animal. He was weary of making suppositions and useless projects; neither perspicacity, intelligence, nor resolution could be of any use to him. Caught in a hopeless net by an unknown enemy, like a poor fly in the web of a mysterious spider, the only result of his struggles would be to make his position worse; a victim to a horrible trick or an infamous piece of treachery, he had simply to await his fate silently. Worn out by the events and emotions of that terrible day, though he desired to remain awake and to note what would happen, he felt his eyelids close in spite of himself. Although his mind was wide awake, his body was sinking into sleep.

Meanwhile the wind had veered, and Captain Peppercull, who was engaged in drinking rum to keep out the night air, abandoned his pleasant occupation, and on the advice of the stranger with the black mantle, who had watched the wind with the eye of an experienced sea-faring man, went up on deck, staggering a little. As the fog was particularly damp that night, Captain Peppercull, like a very prudent man, had taken

extraordinary precautions against it; but he was not the kind of fellow to be overcome by a glass of rum, and two or three breaths of fresh air soon made him himself again.

"Captain, the tide is with us, the wind has gone around; we must be off to sea, for our expedition to England is over," said the man with the mantle, as Peppercull came on deck.

"To hear is to obey," replied the latter, unconsciously parodying the formula of Eastern devotion; for the man with the mantle seemed to inspire him with respect mixed with fear, though naturally Captain Peppercull was neither servile nor cowardly. The word was passed to heave the anchor, the capstan bars were shipped, and the crew having manned them began to walk around, singing on a plaintive rhythm a singular chant composed of the plaint of the wind, the sob of the wave, and the cry of the gull, in which the restlessness of nature seems to mingle with human effort. The anchor came away, and already several turns of the chain had been rolled around the drum of the capstan, wetting the deck with mud.

By the strange sound, and the regular trampling which accompanied it, Benedict — who was already half

carried away into a dream full of strange catastrophes and sinister apparitions, the confused image of his adventures of the day — understood that the anchor was being got up and the vessel preparing to start. Although this did not make his situation much worse, and at bottom he cared little enough whether he was a captive in a motionless prison or in a travelling one, he felt deep sadness overcoming him. To be a prisoner in England, in a land full of friends engaged in seeking him out, to breathe the same air as Annabel, — was still some consolation; now he could not count upon the efforts of his relatives and friends to find him out. How would it be possible to discover his track in a wake which vanished almost as soon as formed? Annabel was lost forever to him.

The singular chant still continued. Soon the anchor was catted and fished; the crew, running up to the tops and out on the yards, loosed the sails, which opened to the breeze like the wings of a sea-bird about to take flight; but held in by the sheets and tacks, they bellied out, swelled, and imparting their own impulsion to the "Lovely Jenny," made her gracefully heel over.

Macgill, standing by the panel lighted by a trembling light, held the wheel, steering the "Lovely Jenny,"

which was as sensitive as a horse with a tender mouth is to the action of the bit and bridle; he shook her up or eased her away, avoiding the ships and boats which the approach of daylight called from their torpor, and which were tacking and cross-tacking in every direction on the broad estuary.

The morning began to show: lines of faint light rayed the thick banks of clouds; the red lanterns of the lightships were turning paler in the blaze of nascent day; the banks of the stream, scarcely visible, were vanishing on the horizon, and the yellow waters rose and fell in broader seas. One felt the nearness of the open, and the "Lovely Jenny," cradled by the roll, pitched and scended in a smother of foam.

Benedict, half asleep, was leaning upon his horsehair pillow when the creaking of the door quickly awakened him; the panel slipped along its grooves, and the man with the black mantle appeared on the threshold of the cabin.

The room was dark and Benedict was unable to make out at once the features of the man who broke upon his solitude; the shade of the broad-brimmed hat stil' concealed his face, and the folds of the mantle his figure.

The new-comer's intention was not to maintain his

incognito longer, for he advanced under the small lamp that was burning, threw back his mantle, took off his hat, and revealed to the surprised glance of Arundel the face of Sir Arthur Sidney. Arundel could not keep back a cry of surprise. Sir Arthur Sidney remained perfectly calm, opposite his friend, as if nothing extraordinary had happened; the light of the lamp, playing upon his satiny brow, formed a sort of halo around his head; his glance was calm, and his features expressed perfect serenity.

"What, is it you, Arthur?"

"Yes, I returned from India this morning."

"What does this mean, Arthur?" cried Benedict, convinced at last of Sidney's identity.

"It means," quietly replied Sidney, "that I had not consented to your marriage, and I had to stop it; I must ask you to forgive the means I had to employ — I had no others, and so used these."

"That is very strange conduct of yours," replied Benedict, somewhat disconcerted by the calm simplicity of the answer. "Are you my father, my uncle, or my guardian, to assume such rights over me?"

"I am more than that; I am your friend," replied Sidney, gravely.

"It is a curious way to prove it, to destroy the happiness of my life and plunge me into the most dreadful despair."

"Your grief will pass away," said Arthur, "lovers' pains do not last long; the wind carries them away like sea-gulls' feathers at sea. Besides, you do not belong to yourself," he continued, drawing from his pocket a paper which he unfolded and presented to Benedict.

The paper, already yellowed by time, seemed to have been written long since; the folds were worn, the ink had no doubt changed colour; the writing was reddish, as if blood had been used instead of ink.

At the sight of this cabalistic-looking paper, which was not unlike a pact with the devil, Sir Benedict Arundel seemed embarrassed and kept silence.

"Is that your signature?" said Sidney, holding the paper to Benedict's eyes.

"Yes, that is my name," replied Sir Benedict, in a resigned tone.

"Did you freely put your name there?"

"I cannot say that I was forced," answered Arundel. "Yes, I did write my name there, when I was full of enthusiasm and faith."

"The oath contained in this letter is a dread one. You swore by whatever can bind a man on the earth on which we live, by the God who created the worlds, by the demon who seeks to destroy them, by Heaven and Hell, by your father's honour and your mother's virtue, by your blood as a gentleman, by your soul as a Christian, by your word as a free man, by the memory of heroes and saints, on the Gospels and on the sword; and in case our religion should be but a mistake, you swore by fire and water, the sources of life, by the secret forces of nature, by the stars, the mysterious regulators of Fate, by Chronos and Jupiter, by Acheron and by Styx, which formerly bound the gods. If there be on earth a more irrevocable formula, I do not know of it; but when you wrote those lines you sought everything most dread and sacred, to give force to the oath contained in this paper."

"That is true," replied Arundel.

"I needed you," continued Sidney, "and in virtue of the rights which this paper confers upon me, I came to fetch you, since you did not come."

Benedict, as if cast down, bent his head and made no answer.

"When you are calmer," continued Sidney, "I

shall tell you what I expect of you, and what you will have to do." Whereupon he withdrew, closing behind him the sliding panel; and the "Lovely Jenny," driven by a strong wind, made her way into the open sea.

XI

I SHALL profit by the fact that the "Lovely Jenny" is reeling off her ten knots an hour, with a good breeze, to go back some distance in my story. I have to explain how Miss Edith happened to be in the Thames on that stormy night, about to be swallowed up in the waters, instead of being in her scented bridal chamber.

No doubt my readers will remember that a meanly dressed man had handed Count de Volmerange a sealed letter, as he left the church. That letter the Count, his mind full of other matters, had left in his pocket without opening it, thinking he would read it later; but he had forgotten to do so amid the emotions of the day. In the evening, however, having been left alone for a moment, he felt the paper crackling in his pocket, and mechanically opened and read it.

At that very moment he was informed that Edith was waiting for him. He arose, straight and stiff like the statue of the Commander when invited by Lepo-

rello to sup with Don Juan. In his hand he clutched the fatal paper. A deadly pallor overspread his face, in which his dark blue eyes showed bloodshot. His feet struck the floor heavily, as if they were of marble. Borne down by the weight of crushing misfortune, he stepped heavily like the marble apparition.

Edith, protected by the transparent shade of the curtains, half concealed her face in the lace-trimmed pillow; her bloodless cheeks were so white they could scarcely be distinguished from the cambric on which they rested.

She was a prey to terrible perplexity; she was agitated by the knowledge of her fault, and knew not what to resolve. Time and again she had endeavoured to make a confession, and yet had been unable to begin; nothing seemed to lead up to so strange a confidence. That most improbable *liaison*, the result of almost supernatural fascination, had remained absolutely unsuspected by all. Everybody around Edith had such complete faith in her purity, that she herself at times wondered whether she had lost it. There was no opening for such a confidence. Her blushes, her pallor, her silence, were mistaken for the maidenly emotions which young girls experience as

the marriage day approaches. Even legitimate love has its troubles, and tears are the order of the day in the eyes of young brides.

Every morning she said to herself, "I must speak," but the day would pass without her having spoken. The preparations for the wedding went on without her venturing to stay them, and the revelation became more and more impossible. She loved Volmerange, and although she was a girl of perfectly truthful character, to whom the very shadow of deceit was repugnant, she had not the strength to destroy her own happiness. She had felt cowardly at the thought of such a misfortune, and like all people who reckon on some impossible event to free them from a desperate situation, she had allowed matters to take their course; now the terrible moment had arrived, and like a dove crouching on the ground as she hears around her the swooping of the hawk, she was waiting and trembling with anxiety and terror. Then it occurred to her it would have been best to refuse Volmerange, and not to accept the happiness of which she was no longer worthy. Now, however, it was too late.

It should be said in Edith's favour, that she was guilty, but not degraded; hers was one of those natures

which evil can touch but cannot penetrate, like marble, which mud soils, but does not stain, and which the rain of heaven makes purer and whiter than before. Her fall was due to the noblest motives. Xavier had played to Edith a comedy of misfortune; he had represented himself as an oppressed, misunderstood man, compelled to remain within his humble sphere by the invincible prejudices of aristocracy; and he had contended that Lord Harley's daughter could love but a lord, a fashionable man with a large fortune. These things, said very quietly, with an air of coldness and resignation, but with eyes that burned with suppressed passion, had impelled Edith's noble and chivalrous nature to a mad devotion and consolation.

She thought she should play the part of Providence to that exiled angel, who was but a fiend; so she had given herself to him, mistaking pity for love. Volmerange's genuine passion had soon made her feel how greatly she had been mistaken; and besides, Xavier, having once triumphed over her, had speedily unmasked himself, and far from opposing, as would have seemed natural, the marriage of Edith and Volmerange, he had in a way insisted upon it, in the pursuit of a dark and sinister purpose, impossible to fathom. Besides, Vol-

merange was so madly in love with Edith that her confession might have upset his reason. Up to a certain point, Edith might still think herself worthy of being loved by an honourable man, and her silence was not perfidious.

When Volmerange entered, Edith understood she was lost. The Count drew near the bed, and slowly and automatically held out the paper to the terrified girl, who huddled up under the blankets with a gesture of instinctive fear.

"Tell me," cried the Count, in a choking voice, with a sort of strident rattle, "tell me that the statements in this letter are false, and I shall believe you, even though the light should blind me."

Poor Edith, half-crazed by terror, sat up, and with haggard eye, trembling lips, pallid cheeks, as if she beheld the Medusa head, looked with the dull, lack-lustre glance of dementia at the paper on which flamed her condemnation. Her sudden gesture had broken the ribbon that held her hair, and her black curls flowed over her shoulders and bosom, — contrasting strongly with their pallid whiteness. Desdemona herself did not start more terrified or more pale at the sinister question of the Moor of Venice; and though

Volmerange was not black as a Moor, he nevertheless had a fierce and terrible air.

There was a moment of silence, full of expectation, anguish, and terror.

Outside, the tempest raged; showers of rain lashed the panes; the wind seemed to press against the window as if to enter, apparently desiring to be present at this nocturnal scene. The house, beaten by the gale, trembled on its foundations; the doors creaked; confused plaints sounded through the corridors; the lamp burned down, revived at times, and cast a pale light, — everything tending to increase the terror of the situation.

The clock struck two. The sound, usually so clear and silvery, now struck lugubriously on the ear.

Volmerange bent over the bed, gnashing his teeth, his eyes flashing; he seized Edith by the arm with imperious brutality, and repeated his words sharply and feverishly. He foamed at the mouth, and had bitten his lips so hard during the moment of silence that they were bleeding.

The girl, seeing so close to her that face whose wondrous beauty could not be effaced even by the contraction of fury, and which recalled the lineaments of

an angered archangel, — felt her strength give way; the fear of swooning came upon her, and she would have lost consciousness if a violent shock had not recalled her to herself. She felt as if her arm had been pulled away from her shoulder. Volmerange had dragged her from the bed; she was in the middle of the room. Another shock made her fall on her knees.

"It is well," said Volmerange; "you shall die!" and he stormed around the room like a madman, looking for a weapon with which to carry out his threat.

"Oh, do not harm me," murmured Edith, in a voice full of anguish.

Volmerange was still searching; a bridal chamber is not usually provided with daggers, pistols, tomahawks, or other lethal weapons.

"Blood and thunder!" cursed he as he raged around like a wild beast, "shall I be obliged to smash her head against the furniture, to strangle her with my hands, to tear her veins open with my nails, or to stifle her under the mattress of my wedding couch? Ha! ha! that would be beautiful," he continued with a maniacal laugh. "A pretty scene, most dramatic and most Shakespearean, in truth!"

He drew near Edith, who was still kneeling, her

arms limp, her hands open, her head bowed upon her breast, her hair hanging down, — in the attitude of Canova's Magdalen. As she saw the madman approach her, the poor child, moved by a supreme instinct of self-preservation, rose as if pushed by a spring, ran to the French window, which opened on the garden, threw it open with the unconscious skill of somnabulists and people in a desperate position, and sprang, borne along by fear, into the dark walks of the garden, followed by Volmerange.

She did not feel the gravel and shells hurting her delicate bare feet; the rain-laden branches swept her face and her bare shoulders, and seemed to try to hold her back by the folds of her wrapper. The burning breath of Volmerange almost reached her neck, and several times the madman's desperate hands had almost grasped her.

She thus reached the parapet of the terrace, which she leapt over, leaving on the iron spikes a fragment of muslin — the only trace left on which Lord and Lady Harley could build conjectures. Her husband reached the street almost as soon as she did, and the pursuit continued.

Poor Edith's strength was beginning to give way; her knees knocked against each other; the blood

surged in her temples; her breath came short and quick. She had already traversed, poor hunted doe, one or two streets, deserted on account of the advanced hour and the storm; but even if a belated passer-by had happened to be there, he would not have helped her, taking her for a street-walker escaping after a row in some nocturnal orgy, or pursued by some one she had robbed.

In the course of her flight she reached the Thames, and Blackfriars Bridge, and began to cross it breathless and with slower steps. When she was near the centre, her breath and her strength abandoning her, her feet bleeding, her wrapper covered with mud, soaked by the last showers of the storm, and clinging to her burning, chilled body, — she stopped and leaned against the parapet, resolved no longer to dispute her life; after all, it was still a happiness to die by his hand, since she could no longer live for him.

The Count, having come up to her, seized her two arms and said to her: —

"Swear that the contents of the letter are false."

Edith, who, after yielding to the impulse of physical terror, had recovered all her natural dignity, replied: —

"The letter tells the truth; I will not save my life by a falsehood."

Volmerange raised her as if she had been a feather, and swung her for a moment beyond the parapet over the black gulf. The invisible waters roared and stormed under the arch; never had a thicker night overspread the Thames.

"Sombre abyss, keep forever the secret of my dishonour!" said the Count, leaning half way over the parapet. Then he opened his hands.

A plaint as soft as the sigh of a stifled dove was Edith's last prayer. The wind uttered a long moan of despair, and a light white flake fell through the thick mist like a feather falling from a swan's wing, and dropped into the river; from above, it was impossible to hear the sound of the fall, drowned by the murmur of the water, the creaking of boats, the shrieking of the gale, and the innumerable sounds which form the lamentation of nature on a stormy night.

"Now for the other," said Volmerange, as he retraced his steps; "I must find him, were he concealed in the very lowest circle of hell."

And he plunged into the labyrinth of streets, with a swift, resolute step.

Carried away by the rapidity of my narration, I did not state that a man, who might have been taken for a shadow, stood close to the wall of the Count's house. Was he watching for himself or for some one else? That is what I am not aware of. Was he a thief, a lover, a spy, a foe, or a friend? Did he foresee the catastrophe which was bound to come, and did he desire to witness it, himself invisible? I am not yet in position to answer these questions. All I can say is that the nocturnal prowler saw Edith spring from the terrace, Volmerange pursue her and throw her into the Thames, without attempting to interfere with the dreadful affair, satisfied with being a silent spectator of it. When Volmerange, having accomplished his vengeance, returned into the city, the shadow followed him from afar, keeping step with him, so as to not lose sight of him, and yet not to be noticed.

His brain whirling, his heart filled with rage and regrets, Volmerange walked on to Regent's Park, where, overcome by fatigue, grief, and despair, he let himself fall on a bench at the foot of a tree, in a state of complete prostration. His mind was a blank, and his head nodded on his shoulders; his

vigorous figure was limp; he sank into that dull stupor by which nature, weary of suffering, avoids moral or physical torture.

While he dozed, the dark shadow drew near him, with so light, furtive and cat-like a step that not a grain of sand moved, not a blade of grass bent. He placed on Volmerange's knees a paper of curious shape, and an envelope full of letters; then withdrawing still more softly, concealed himself behind the trees, from which he could not be distinguished.

Light as had been the touch, it woke Volmerange, who saw the paper and the envelope placed so mysteriously on his knees, and ran to the lamp. The envelope contained letters from Edith, proving her guilt; the paper bore these words: —

"I swear never to dispose of my person, never to bind myself in any way, by marriage or otherwise, and to ever hold myself free for the supreme junta; I swear it by the God who created the worlds, by the demon who seeks to destroy them, by Heaven and Hell, by my father's honour and my mother's virtue, by my blood as a gentleman, by my soul as a Christian, by my word as a free man, by the memory of heroes and saints, on the Gospels and on my sword, and in case our religion

should be but a mistake, I swear by fire and water, the sources of life, by the secret forces of nature, by the stars, the mysterious regulators of Fate, by Chronos and Jupiter, by Acheron and by Styx, which formerly bound the gods.

"Signed with my blood,

"VOLMERANGE."

XII

AFTER he had read, the Count, maddened with grief and rage, traversed the park in every direction, seeking the mysterious being who while he dozed had thrown on his knees Edith's letters and the formula of the pact which bound him to an unknown power. In vain he traversed the walks and explored the shrubbery; he failed to discover any one. It is true the night was dark, and the pale light of distant lamps alone guided him in his pursuit. Wearied by his mad chase, he left the park and walked towards Primrose Hill.

The houses became more scattered, the fields began to invade the city, and soon he found himself in the country, climbing the lower slopes of the hill.

His goings and comings had taken time, and the late November dawn was beginning to show in the heaven, filled with great clouds like huge bodies left on the tempest's battlefield. Nothing could be more unlike Homer's rosy-fingered dawn than this sinister British sunrise.

He let himself fall at the foot of a tree, that shivered in the sharp breeze of morning, having lost already more than half its leaves, and drew from his pocket Edith's lacerated letters, which he had put there mechanically. While they left him no doubt as to his own misfortune, they were written in a constrained style; passion expressed itself in them with embarrassment; it seemed as though the girl had yielded to involuntary fascination rather than to sympathy.

This reading embittered still further Volmerange's suffering, but read he must, in order to justify his vengeance to himself. After his violent and terrible act doubts had occurred to him, not as to the certainty of Edith's guilt, but as to the justice of the punishment. Her white form falling through the darkness into the black gulf of the river constantly passed before his eyes, like a visible remorse; he asked himself if he had not gone far beyond his rights as a husband and a gentleman in inflicting a dreadful death upon a young and lovely girl standing upon the threshold of life. Guilty as Edith certainly was, she had been so bitterly punished that it made her innocent.

Any one who that morning should have told him that by night he would be a murderer would have appeared

to him a maniac; and yet he had just pitilessly destroyed a defenceless woman, whom he had sworn before God and man to protect. The terrible execution he had carried out, although justified by the laws of honour, terrified him and appeared to him in all its dread gravity. Besides, ought not his vengeance to have been vented upon Edith's accomplice? Carried away by blind wrath he had deprived himself, by slaying the culprit, of all means of ascertaining the source of the crime. It was the infamous seducer whose name he ought to have dragged from Edith, and whom he would have delighted in torturing slowly, and with most ingenious barbarity; for swift death would not have satisfied his thirst for vengeance.

Then, recalling the bonds which connected him with the mysterious association whose oath my readers have read, he grew wrathy at this setting-up of authority after years of silence; and, although the oath had not been extracted from him, he felt his independence revolted at this claim to dispose of him. He had sworn, it was true, but in the enthusiasm of youth, to serve with his whole strength and mind a common idea, but that was no reason why he should crush down the

feelings of his heart, cease to be a man, and become a reed in a hidden hand.

He seemed to note a strange coincidence between Edith's dishonour and this recalling of the oath he had taken. Was not the purpose to detach him, by this terrible blow, from human things, and to profit by his despair to launch him into an impossible enterprise?

He recalled a remark once made by one of the influential members of the association: "God put woman on the earth lest man should do too great things." By showing to him the unworthiness of the woman he loved, no doubt they had expected to convince him irrevocably of the truth of Shakespeare's maxim: "Frailty, thy name is woman," and to make him renounce forever her treacherous attraction.

"Oh!" said he to himself, "whom can I trust henceforth, if the face can lie like the lips, if candour deceives, if chastity is but a mask, if the celestial spark is but a reflection of hell, if the heart of the rose is full of poison, if the virginal wreath is placed upon hair cast loose in debauch? Edith, Edith, I had intrusted to you, fearlessly and unsuspectingly, the honour of my ancient line; I believed you would transmit pure the blood of the old knights and the royal blood of India

which flows in my veins. And yet she loved me, I am sure of it," he exclaimed, striking his knee violently with his fist; "her sweet glance told the truth; her voice had the accent of real love; there is in all this some horrible machination! On the other hand, she did not once deny the accusation; she did not utter a single word in her own defence. She is guilty, guilty, guilty," he went on, continually repeating the word with the monotonous insistence of people who feel their ideas escape them, and who cling to the last syllable they have uttered, as a saving bough clutched by their fast disappearing reason.

Tears rolled silently and uninterruptedly down his cheeks; he did not even think of wiping them away, and repeated with a crazed look, as if it were the refrain of a ballad, "She is guilty, guilty, guilty!"

Day had now come, and from the heights of Primrose Hill the eye roamed over the city of London, which was beginning to smoke like a boiling caldron; it was a grand and magnificent spectacle: long trails of bluish mists outlined the course of the Thames, and here and there arose from out the fog the pointed spires of churches, touched by slanting beams of light. The two towers of Westminster rose up almost directly

before him in the dark mist; the statue of the Duke of York stood like a little doll, upon its slender column; on the left the Monument raised to heaven its flames of gilded bronze; the Tower, its group of dungeons; St. Paul's showed its dome, flanked by two campaniles; light and shadow played over the waves of houses, — broken here and there by islets of parks or squares, — with a grandeur and majesty worthy of the ocean; but Volmerange, although his set glance seemed to contemplate this marvellous panorama with the deepest attention, actually saw nothing; the pale shadow of Edith concealed the prospect from him.

His anger was expended, and he was in such a state of prostration that a child could have mastered him at that moment; his vitality had been wholly exhausted in that vast projection; he had emptied himself into his crime. He endeavoured to rise, but his knees sank under him; his eyes clouded, his brow was covered with cold sweat, and he fell again at the foot of the tree.

At that moment there passed along the road a man of honest mien, and simple but comfortable dress; one with a face such as may be met a thousand times with-

out its being recognised, so cleverly do such men know how to wear the mask and domino of the crowd.

He approached Volmerange, who, worn out by emotion and fatigue, and chilled by the night air, was almost fainting.

"What is the matter, sir?" said the passer-by, with an air of interest. "You are very pale, and seem to be in pain."

"Oh! nothing, a passing weakness," answered the Count, almost inaudibly.

"It is a lucky chance that has brought me this way: I am a physician, and was paying a visit to one of my patients on Primrose Hill; I have some restoratives here," said the man, drawing from his pocket a small case like a surgeon's case, from which he drew a vial, apparently containing salts.

"Yes, I do not feel very well," murmured Volmerange, as his head fell.

The kindly passer-by opened the vial, from which arose a penetrating smell, and placed it under the patient's nostrils; but whatever it contained did not produce the effect which might have been expected: instead of recovering from his faint, Volmerange seemed to swoon away more completely, and the effort he had

made to breathe in the exciting odour appeared to have exhausted the little strength he had left.

The passer-by who had called himself a physician, although he saw that the patient's swoon was being prolonged, still held to his nostrils the vial, which he ought to have drawn away when he saw it did not produce the right effect. Lethargy seemed to have followed on syncope. Volmerange, his arms limp, his body sunk, his head rolling from one shoulder to the other, was now merely an inert statue.

"A capital invention," murmured the strange physician, very much satisfied with the peculiar result of his assistance. "He is now in a suitable condition; he does not know whether he is in heaven, on earth, or in hell; he can be taken and carried off without being any more aware of it than a bale of goods or a man dead for a week. We could take him to China, as he is now; but let me see if I can find a carriage in which to put him."

He sprang down to the road as if to see at a greater distance. Nor did he remain long at his position: a hackney coach, returning to London, appeared on the horizon of the road, with a flashing and a thundering of wheels.

The supposed physician made a sign to the coachman; the carriage was empty, and the coachman drew up near the bank on which lay Volmerange.

"Help me," said the false doctor, "to put this gentleman in your carriage; he took too much Spanish and French wine at supper, and fell asleep under this tree while taking his morning walk. I know him and will take him home."

The coachman helped the stranger to place Volmerange into the coach without a word, for a drunken gentleman was not so uncommon as to cause astonishment. The driver as he climbed back to his box, merely sighed in a melancholy fashion, and said to himself: "What a lucky man that lord is, to be drunk so early." And thereupon he drove in the direction indicated by the man, who had pointed out a house situated along one of the roads that succeed the streets in the suburbs of London.

After a few minutes, the carriage stopped before a wall in which was a little green door, with a brass knob shining like gold. Trees almost leafless, showing over the coping of the wall, denoted that a pretty large garden separated the house from the street.

The man who had given Volmerange the cordial

that had stupefied him, pulled the bell; he rang several times, leaving between each ring an interval which seemed to have a meaning settled upon beforehand.

A servant opened; the man whispered a few words to him; the servant went back into the house, and soon reappeared, followed by two men with olive complexions and queer faces, who took Volmerange and carried him away into a wing of round shape, which formed, at the corner of the main building, one of those towers frequently met with in English architecture.

The coachman, handsomely paid, drove away thinking the matter quite natural; he had driven back to his home more than one nobleman in a state at least as peculiar as that of Volmerange.

The man with the vial, having finished his mission, withdrew at once, after having written on a square of paper, which he tore from his note-book, a few words half in cipher, half in characters in an unknown tongue, and handed it to the servant who had opened the gate.

The house to which Volmerange had been brought, was so elegant and rich as to preclude any idea of robbery or kidnapping. A white and rose awning shaded the white marble steps; perfectly clear mirrors, placed above the chimney-places, reflected huge China

vases, filled with flowers; the glass roof and sides of a vast greenhouse, which seemed to prolong the drawing-room, rose above a regular virgin forest; Bourbon palms, bamboos, tulip trees, roseapple trees, creepers, passion flowers, shaddocks, cacti, bloomed with tropical exuberance, bristling with darts, knives, and claws,—their calyxes bursting like shells of perfume and colour, and the petals of their flowers palpitating like the wings of Cashmere butterflies.

The two dark-complexioned lackeys placed the sleeping Volmerange upon a sofa and withdrew silently, appearing in no wise surprised at the arrival of this gentleman, whom, no doubt, they then saw for the first time.

He had been resting for some little time, still under the influence of the narcotic, and yet no one appeared. The room in which he was laid presented, though furnished with elegance and simplicity, some peculiarities that might have assisted a careful observer: a fine Indian matting covered the flooring, and on the mantel was placed the figure of the Trimorti, representing Brahma, Vishnu, and Siwa; a buckler of elephant-skin, a curved sabre, a Malay creese, and two javelins were arranged in a trophy upon the wall. These char-

acteristic details, less remarkable in London than anywhere else, seemed to denote the abode of a wealthy Calcutta nabob, or of a high official of the Honourable East India Company.

Presently a brocade portière was drawn aside, and gave passage to a strange figure; it was a pale, old man, somewhat bent, who advanced leaning on a stick as white as ivory. His thin, dry, mummified face was the colour of Cordova leather or Havana tobacco; broad, dark rings circled his hollow eyes, that gleamed like those of a wild beast, and the brilliancy of which was in no wise deadened by age; his eagle nose was almost ossified, and the hardened cartilage shone like bone; his hollow cheeks, deeply wrinkled, clung to the jaws, and his lips, shrivelled by the use of betel, had turned his teeth the colour of gold. The knuckles of the hands, almost like those of an ourang-outang, were transversely wrinkled, like the insteps of hussars' boots. A small reddish wig covered his tanned head, burned and as it were calcined by the sun, and within which glowed fierce passions and the devouring fire of a fixed thought. Below the wig, sparkled two golden rings, hung from the lobe of the ears, that were like pieces of old leather.

Any one seeing that yellow, wrinkled spectre, so dry that his joints creaked as he walked, would have taken him, not for a centenarian, but for a millenarian. He looked fabulously old, and yet his eyes, the only living things in his odd face, shone like those of a youth; the whole vigour of his body, kept alive by a powerful will, had concentrated in them.

If Volmerange could have thrown off the invincible torpor that overmastered him and kept him sunk in a stupor of sleep, he would have shuddered on beholding that strange being gliding towards him like a phantom; he would have believed himself a prey to nightmare; for in spite of the full, black coat, the breeches and the silk stockings, — which a clergyman about to ascend the pulpit would not have disavowed, and which constituted a dress not entirely suited to an apparition, — the old man seemed to have arrived direct from the other world.

Yet he did not seem to be inspired by any evil feeling, and he drew near the bed with an air as plainly satisfied as his stuffed Pharaoh complexion and innumerable wrinkles, called out on his antediluvian face by his smile, were capable of assuming.

He still held in his hand the paper on which the man who had handed Volmerange over to the servant

had scribbled a few mysterious signs, and the contents were no doubt agreeable to him, for as he read it once more before throwing it into the fire, he murmured: "The fellow is very intelligent; I must remember to reward his zeal."

He then sat down near Volmerange, waiting for the effects of the narcotic to pass off; but, seeing that the young Count did not awake, he called for his dark lackeys and had him placed upon a bed in a neighbouring room.

This room, decorated and furnished with extreme magnificence, recalled the fabulous splendours of Eastern tales; there was none richer or more splendid in any palace in Hyderabad or Benares. Slender columns of white marble, up which ran vine-stalks, the leaves represented by seed emeralds, and the clusters by garnets, — supported a ceiling carved, wrought, ornamented, and divided into numerous compartments full of flowers, stars, and fantastic ornaments, as thick as a forest glade. On the walls ran a carved frieze representing the chief mysteries of Indian theogony, — a whole world of gods, with elephants' trunks and polyps' arms, holding in their hands lotus-flowers, sceptres, scourges; monsters, half man, half animal, with leafy

limbs twisted into arabesques, mystic symbols of deep cosmogonic thoughts. In spite of their hieratic stiffness and the childish artlessness of the work, these carvings had a strange, lifelike look; the complications and interlacings made them swarm before one's eyes, and imparted to them a sort of motionless action.

Broad damask portières brocaded with gold fell in heavy folds between the pillars; a thick, soft multicoloured carpet of complicated design, the palm leaves on which made it resemble a cashmere shawl woven for a giantess, covered the floor. Around the room ran a low divan, covered with one of those marvellous stuffs on which India seems to weave with silks the brilliant tints of its sky and its flowers.

A soft, milky light, passing through ground glass, illumined this Asiatic magnificence, and was made still fainter by an imperceptible cloud of bluish smoke arising from perfume-burners in the four corners of the room, — imparting to it, though it was already surprising enough, a fairylike aspect. Through this vaporous gauze the gold, the garnets, the crystals, and projecting carvings were strangely phosphorescent, and flashed with sudden gleams. A portion of the bas-relief, touched by the light, seemed to leave the pillar, to turn

on itself, and to twist into a spiral. Either the aroma of the exotic flowers springing from great vases had an intoxicating effect, or the perfume-burners contained some of those inebriating preparations of which India has the secret, and which it is accustomed to use, for in the course of a few minutes everything assumed in this hall, that resembled a pagoda, the vague and changing appearance of objects seen in dreams.

The strange personage whose appearance I have sketched reappeared after a short absence, but he had thrown off his black European clothes; a turban, artistically rolled, had replaced the red wig on his shaven skull; two white lines, drawn with consecrated powder, rayed his tawny brow; a ring of brilliants sparkled in his nose; a muslin robe fell from his shoulders to his feet in straight folds, unbroken by the body they covered, so thin was the old man. His copper face, showing between the great turban and the long white dress, produced a strange contrast; the two white lines had restored to the dark features their Indian sombreness. He looked like a devotee emerging from the caves of Elephanta, or the pagoda of Juggernaut, for the function of the car with the bloody wheels.

He stood by the bed waiting until the Count, having got rid of the narcotic, should wake from his slumbers.

Volmerange had already tried to open his eyes, and through his half-openlids had faintly caught sight of the tall pillars, the lofty ceiling of the hall, and the old Hindoo standing by him like a phantom, gazing upon him with the fixed glance of a figure in a dream ; but Volmerange did not believe that what he saw was a reality ; he still fancied himself wandering through the chimerical countries of sleep. To have fainted at the foot of a tree on Primrose Hill, and to recover one's senses upon a Cashmere divan in a hall of Aureng Zeb's palace, in the very depths of India, nine thousand miles from the place where one lost consciousness, is enough to astonish a brain less shaken than was Volmerange's. So he remained motionless, not knowing whether he was awake or asleep, and seeking to recover the broken thread of his thoughts. At last, making up his mind to open his eyes fully, he cast around him a look of astonishment, and could not this time refuse to believe in the existence of what he beheld.

The place in which he found himself, though very fanciful, had nothing of the architecture of dreams: it

was the hand of man, and not that of the spirits which fill sleep with impalpable wonders, that had fluted the columns, painted the ceiling, carved the *bassi-relievi*; he was not resting on a bank of clouds, but upon an unmistakable bed. He could see a huge China peony, with its scarlet bloom, in a vase of Japanese porcelain; the perfume tickled his olfactory nerves with genuine aroma. The face of the Hindoo, though worthy of a nocturnal fancy, presented shadows and lights that were quite appreciable, and the modelling was positive. There was no further reason for doubt.

Raising himself on his elbow, Volmerange put to the tall, white phantom the inevitable question in such cases, and said, like the hero of a tragedy who has recovered from his bewilderment: —

"Where am I?"

"In a place in which you are most welcome," replied the Hindoo, bowing respectfully.

At this moment the sound of bells was heard behind the curtain, the rings slid over the bars, and a third person entered the room.

XIII

A YOUNG girl of incredible beauty, wearing a rich Indian costume, appeared in the room, — appeared is the word, for she would have been taken for an Apsara, come down from Indra's court, rather than for a mere mortal.

Her complexion — a singular one according to European ideas — had the brilliancy of gold; its amber tint, like that which time has given to the flesh tints in pictures by Titian, did not prevent, however, a rosy bloom flushing the maiden's cheeks. Her almond-shaped eyes, surmounted by such clean brows that they seemed drawn with Indian ink, lengthened towards the temples, and were made longer still by a line of surmeh. The eyelids were fringed with blue lashes; the pupils shone with velvet brilliancy, and looked like two black stars on a silver sky. The nose, thin and delicately formed, with rosy nostrils, was slightly tattooed at the root, with tincture of gorothchana; and from the nostrils hung a golden ring, studded with

diamonds, through the circle of which shone purest pearls set in a smile as golden as the fruit of the jujube tree. The diamonds and pearls, mingling their gleams, imparted to the somewhat dull complexion a light which it otherwise might have lacked. The smooth cheeks, as unctuous as ivory, ran into the chin in lines of ideal purity. King Douchmonta himself, the Indian Raphael, could not have reproduced with his graceful brush all the delicacy of these contours. Behind the ears, which were small and bordered with a pearly line, like a Ceylon shell, the silky, scented bloom of a branch of siricah, fastened to a filigree knot, fell gracefully over the delicate cheek of the maiden. Her hair, the parting of which was marked by a line of carmine, was divided into bands, joined on her neck in tresses bound with gold thread, and covered with plates of jewels that stood out against its dark-blue colour. Her breasts, bound in by a narrow vest of crimson silk, so covered with ornaments that the stuff almost disappeared, were separated by a knot formed of filaments of lotus, that shone like silver threads or woven moonbeams. Her lovely arms, round and flexible as creepers, were clasped near the shoulders by bracelets in the form of serpents, like those of the god Maha-

dava, and the wrists by quintuple ropes of pearls. The palms of her hands, small as a child's, were dyed red, and diamond rings shone on every finger. A golden girdle studded with amethysts and garnets, bound her supple waist, — bare from the corset to the hip, according to Oriental fashion, — and held in the folds of trousers of striped stuff, which, fastened at the ankles, showed, emerging from a mass of pearly anklets and gilded circlets adorned with little bells, two pretty little feet with polished heels and toes laden with rings and dyed red with henna like the cheeks of a virgin blushing with shame. A scarf, with as many colours as the rainbow, or the tail of the peacock on which rides Saravasti, and the two ends of which were drawn under her golden belt, played caressingly around her undulating body, slender as the stalk of a palm. On her bosom streamed, with metallic rustlings, a cascade of necklaces of pearls of all colours, of shimmering necklets of golden balls, and lotus flowers strung in chaplets, — in a word, all that Hindoo coquetry can invent in the way of splendour and beauty; mysterious marks, made with sandal powder, showed faintly on the lower portion of her neck amid this phosphorescent brilliancy; and in order that the costumes should lack

not the least trace of local colour, the maiden breathed a faint and delightful perfume of ousire.

Neither Parvati, the spouse of Mahadava, nor Misrakesi, nor Menaca, equalled in beauty the young Hindoo maid who advanced towards Volmerange, petrified with surprise, — her necklets, her bracelets, and the bells of her anklets rustling as she walked.

The mysterious poetry of India seemed to be incorporated in that lovely girl, brilliant and sombre, delicate and wild, splendid and nude, appealing to every thought and to every sense, — to thought by her symbolical tattooing and ornaments, to the senses by her beauty, her radiance, and her perfume; gold, diamonds, pearls and flowers turned her into a focus of beams the brightest of which were those that flashed from her eyes.

She came thus to the divan with soft undulations, full of chaste voluptuousness, pressing on her heels like Sacountala on the sand of the flowery path; and when she had come opposite to Volmerange, she knelt and remained in the same attitude of respectful contemplation as Lakmi admiring Vishnu lying on his lotus leaf, and floating on the infinite, under the shadow of his serpent dais.

Although Volmerange had every reason to believe he was awake, he must have thought himself the plaything of some prodigious hallucination; there was so little connection between the events of the past night and what he now beheld that he might well have believed his brain was turned; yet nothing could be more real than the lovely being kneeling before him.

The scene deeply impressed him: his mother was a Hindoo, who belonged to one of the royal races dispossessed by the English conquest; the Asiatic blood which flowed in his veins, mingling with the colder blood of the North, seemed at this moment to run more rapidly, and to carry away with it the European portion. The remembrances of his childhood came crowding back, and he saw as in a mirage rising on the horizon, the snow crests of the Himalayas, the swelling domes of the pagodas, the orange bloom of the asoca, and the loving couples of swans floating on the blue waters of the Malini. The whole poetry of the past revived in that retrospective revelation. The architecture of the room, the perfume of the madhavi, the old Hindoo's dress, the dazzling radiance of the maiden, awoke in him forgotten remembrances; the very face

of the lovely creature, prostrate before him in an attitude of amorous adoration, was not wholly new, although he was sure he saw her for the first time. Yet where had they met? In the world of dreams, or in some anterior incarnation? He could not tell; yet a confused swarm of thoughts buzzed around his head, and he seemed to have lived a long time with her whom he had seen but for a few minutes.

The old, yellow-faced, white-robed phantom seemed to have reckoned on this effect; with strange persistency he fixed his flashing glance on Volmerange, as if to read his inmost thoughts.

Apparently the Count did not manifest his emotions strongly enough to satisfy Daksha, — for thus was the Hindoo called, — for he signed to the maiden to speak.

"My dear lord," said she, in Hindoostani speech, full of vowels and sweet as music, "have you forgotten Priyamvada?"

The sounds of the tongue he had spoken in India in his childhood, but which he had neglected since he lived in Europe, first sounded on his ears merely as a melodious, murmuring rhythm, and it took him some time to make out the meaning; he had understood the air before he grasped the words.

"Priyamvada?" he said slowly, and as if taking time to recollect, — "Priyamvada, she whose speech is sweet as honey? No, I do not remember her, and yet it seems to me — why, yes, I knew a child, a little girl —"

"The lapse of ten years has changed into a young girl the child born to your mother's sister."

"Ah! it is you, then, to whom I used to give, for playthings, little ivory elephants, tigers carved of wood, and peacocks of burned clay, painted with many colours. Priyamvada, my cousin with the golden complexion, I had somewhat forgotten our barbaric relationship."

"I had not forgotten it, and I honour in you the last line of kings whose ancestors were gods, and who were seated on the clouds before they were seated on thrones."

"Although your father was European," added Daksha, "a single drop of that divine blood transmitted by your mother makes you the heir of dynasties that lived and flourished centuries before your cold Europe had emerged from chaos or risen from the diluvian waters."

"You are the hope of a whole nation," added Pri-

yamvada, in a musical and caressing voice, with an accent of witching flattery.

"I, the hope of a whole nation? what nonsense!" replied Volmerange.

"Priyamvada has spoken the truth," went on Daksha, bowing and crossing over his bony chest his skinny hands, as black as a monkey's; "Heaven intends you for a great destiny. Touched by the sufferings of my country I devoted myself for thirty years to the most awful austerity, in order to obtain the favour of the gods; born wealthy, I have lived as the poorest pariah; I have treated this miserable body so harshly that it resembles a dried mummy which has lain for forty centuries in the mummy pits of Egypt; for I sought to destroy this weak flesh in order to allow my freed soul to ascend to the sources of things, and to read the thoughts of the gods. Oh! I have suffered much," he continued with increasing exaltation, "and I have paid dearly for the gift of sight. The rain has poured its icy torrents, and the sun its fiery waves, upon my body, which I kept motionless in the most constrained attitude. My nails have grown into my closed hands; burning with thirst, worn out by hunger, repulsive, soiled with filth, having nothing human left about me,

— I have remained for many a summer and many a winter, an object of terror and pity. The termites built their cities by my side; the birds of heaven made their nests in my brush-like hair; and the mud-caked hippopotamus rubbed against me as against a tree trunk; the tiger sharpened his claws upon my side, taking me for a stone; the children tried to drag out my eyes, when they saw them shine like pieces of crystal in the heap of inert clay that I was. The thunderbolt fell on me once, but did not interrupt my prayers. So, Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, took my penance into consideration, and the venerable Trimorti, when, my time having been served, I went to consult it in the caves of the Elephanta, deigned to tell me three times, by the mouths of its triple head, the name of the predestined Saviour."

As he spoke these strange words, Daksha seemed to be transfigured; his bowed frame was erect, his eyes glowed with enthusiasm, his brown face was lighted up, his wrinkles had almost disappeared, and the youth of the soul coming to the surface effaced for a time the decreptitude of the body.

Volmerange, surprised, listened with a sort of respectful terror, while Priyamvada, filled with admiration,

took the hem of the old man's dress and kissed it respectfully; to her, Daksha was a gouro, a divine being, and when she arose her eyes were filled with tears, like the two calixes of lotus pearly with morning dew.

They formed a charming group; the young girl with her graceful movements, her rounded forms, her sumptuous garments, presented an apparently designed contrast to this dry, angular, tall old man: they looked like the incarnation of poetry and fanaticism.

The strange scene had drawn the Count's mind from the events of the night. All that had passed in the nuptial chamber, and on Blackfriars Bridge seemed to him a feverish nightmare, driven away by the soft light of the morning. He asked himself whether he had really been married the day before, and had really hurled his guilty wife into the Thames. He could scarcely believe in the reality of the warning, the letters, the ruin of his happiness, the horrible catastrophe, and he looked dreamily at Daksha and Priyamvada.

Daksha, his excitement over, was little by little returning to commonplace life, and losing his inspired look; he was now only the parchment-like old man,

whose portrait I have already drawn; the prophet had disappeared, the man alone was left, and he said to the Count, with an obsequious smile: —

"Now that your lordship knows you are in the home of Daksha, the mouni of the Brahmin sect, I will withdraw; the ablutions I must make, to purify myself from the soil which even the saint cannot avoid in these infidel cities, compel me to withdraw to my oriental room. Priyamvada shall remain with you, and her conversation will doubtless be more agreeable than that of an old Brahmin, worn out by penance." With these words Daksha let fall the heavy portière which he had raised, and disappeared.

Priyamvada, reclining at Volmerange's feet with the grace of a tame gazelle, took his hand and looking up at him with eyes that shone in their lines of surmeh, said to him in a voice that sounded like a melodious cooing: —

"What troubles my gracious lord? He seems sad and preoccupied; is he not happy?"

For sole reply Volmerange uttered a sigh.

"Oh! no one is happy," continued Priyamvada, "in this accursed climate, in this ungrateful land, where the flowers bloom only under glass, with a stove for a

sun, where the women are pale as the snow on mountain summits and know not what love is."

This remark, which caused Volmerange's wound to bleed again, made him start painfully; his eyes flashed, and the Hindoo maid, noting the look of anger, understood she was right, and went on in her softest voice:

"Has a European woman grieved the descendant of the kings of the lunar dynasty?"

Volmerange did not reply, but his breast heaved with a deep sigh.

Her voice melting into a still softer intonation, Priyamvada continued her questions: —

"Is it possible that my lord, whose dazzling beauty surpasses that of Chandra traversing the heavens on his silver car, was not loved as soon as he deigned to cast his glance on a mere girl, — when the apsaras themselves would rejoice to serve him on bended knee?"

As she uttered these words the maid clasped her arms around Volmerange, like a pretty malica flower clinging to the trunk of the amra. Her lovely face, which she brought close to that of the Count, seemed to say, by the moist brilliance of the eyes and the grace of the smile, how completely safe from such a misfortune her European cousin would have been with her!

For sole reply Volmerange bent his head on Priyamvada's shoulder, who soon felt his tears falling.

"Can it be," said Priyamvada, wiping away with a chaste kiss the tears from Volmerange's eyes, "that this capricious woman of the North, more changeable than the fire of the opal or the chameleon skin, deceived my gracious lord, who has no equal on earth? For a man of the race of the gods weeps only when betrayed."

"Yes, Priyamvada; I have been betrayed, shamefully betrayed," cried Volmerange, unable to keep back his fatal secret any longer.

"And I hope," went on Priyamvada, in the quietest and most musical tone, "that my dear lord has slain the guilty one?"

"The Thames has concealed and punished her fault."

"That is a very gentle punishment; in my country an elephant would have trampled upon her lying bosom, and would have slowly crushed her perfidious heart; or a tiger would have torn like a gauze veil the body she had soiled with another love, — unless her master had preferred to shut up the criminal in a sack with a number of cobras. Let that remembrance fade away

from your mind like a cloudlet swept from heaven, like a flake of foam in the ocean; forget Europe, and come to India where worship awaits you; there in our burning climate, you shall breathe breezes laden with intoxicating scents; there giant flowers bend their calyxes like urns; the lotus spreads languorously upon the consecrated tirthas; in the forests and meads grow the five flowers with which Cama, the god of love, tips his arrows: the tchampaca, the amra, the kesara, the ketaca, and the bilva, — which all inflame the heart with a different but equally hot fire. The dulcet songs of the cokilas and tchavatracas sound from bank to bank; there a glance enslaves one for life; there woman loves beyond the tomb, and her passion burns out only in the ashes of the pyre. There must one live and die for a single love. Oh! come thither, master, and in Priyamvada's arms, on Priyamvada's bosom, will soon pass away, like a winter night's dream, that long Northern nightmare which you mistake for life!"

The Hindoo girl, no doubt believing herself already back in her own land, drew Volmerange to her bosom, on which shivered the golden necklets, and the pearls rustled as her quick breath made her breasts rise

and fall. Thus caught, seized by the bold, virginal caress of the girl, whose passions were as artless and chaste as those of nature in the first days of creation, — Volmerange felt deep emotion; he seemed to see waves of flame pass across his face; unconsciously his arm clasped Priyamvada's firm waist.

The portière was slightly drawn aside, and in the interstices shone the metallic eyes of the old Brahmin; but Volmerange and Priyamvada were too much taken up with each other to notice this.

"Good," said Daksha, as he gazed; "it looks as if Europe and India were being reconciled, and Priyamvada and Volmerange proposed to wed after the gandharva mode, — a most respectable way since Manou has admitted it among his laws. Nothing could better further my plans."

He then withdrew as gently as possible.

"Will you accompany me into the Punjab?" asked Priyamvada of the count, who had just pressed his lips to her brow.

"Yes; but I still have a culprit to punish," answered Volmerange, in a tone full of fury.

"That is proper," replied the maiden; "but permit your slave to feel surprised at the fact that the man

who has offended you has not yet been destroyed by your vengeance."

"I do not know him; I have proof of the crime, but I do not know who is the criminal; the plot was wrought with infernal skill; I have no clue to help me."

"Listen to me," said Priyamvada, thoughtfully. "You Europeans, who depend on your fictitious sciences born yesterday, have ceased to live in communion with nature; you have broken the bonds that bind man to the occult powers of creation. India is the land of traditions and mysteries, its inhabitants know many secrets formerly imparted by the gods, which would amaze your incredulous wise men. Priyamvada is but a little girl whom proud English ladies would consider a savage fit only to amuse their guests; but more than once have I heard the Brahmins, seated on a gazelle skin between the four mysterious braziers, speak of the possible and the impossible. Well, I can show you the culprit, were he concealed in the uttermost ends of the earth."

XIV

PRIYAMVADA arose and fetched from a corner of the room a small Chinese lacquered table, which she placed before Volmerange, who was following her every motion with restless curiosity.

In a crystal cup full of water was a rose-lotus flower, just opened. Priyamvada took the flower and emptied the water into a Japanese vase; then she placed it on the table, after having filled it with water newly drawn from a curiously wrought and carefully closed flagon.

"This," said the young Hindoo girl, "is the mysterious water which flowed from heaven upon Mount Chimavonta; it falls from the mouth of the sacred cow, which is guided in its course by pious Bagireta; it is the sacred water of the river formerly known as the Chlialoros, which now bears the name of Ganges. I drew it as I bent over the marble steps of the Benares pagoda, while performing the prescribed formalities; it therefore possesses all its divine virtues, and our experiment is an assured success."

The Count listened most attentively to Priyamvada, without understanding, however, what she proposed to do.

From a number of boxes she drew powders that she placed upon the porcelain perfume-burners at the four corners of the room; wreaths of faint, bluish vapour arose, and gave out a penetrating odour.

"Now," said Priyamvada to Volmerange, "bend over that cup, and look as attentively as you can into the water it contains, while I pronounce the magic words and call upon the mystic powers."

The scene was utterly unlike an ordinary incantation: there was no cavern, no hovel, no familiar toad, no black cat, no greasy book; but a large, splendid hall, a cup of clear water, perfumes, and a lovely maid. There was nothing very terrific about all this, yet as Volmerange bent over the cup, his heart beat quickly; the unknown is always somewhat alarming, under whatever form it presents itself.

Standing by the table, Priyamvada recited a form of incantation, in a low voice and in a tongue unknown to Volmerange; she appeared to be filled with the liveliest fervour; her eyes were raised to the ceiling, the pupils concealed under the eyelids, and only the pearly

white of the orbs showing; her bosom swelled with ardent sighs, and the fire of prayer imparted a rosy tint to the golden amber of her skin. She continued for some time, then, speaking in an intelligible language, she said, as if addressing beings visible to her alone: —

"Come, Red and Gold, do your duty."

Volmerange, who up to this time had been bending over the cup without perceiving anything else than the pure water, suddenly saw its limpidity clouded by a milky tint, as if smoke were ascending from the bottom.

"Has a cloud appeared?" asked the young Hindoo girl.

"Yes, one would say that an invisible hand had poured some essence in the water, for it has suddenly turned a milky white."

"It is the hand of the spirit troubling the water," answered Priyamvada, quietly.

The Count could not help looking up.

"Do not look beyond the table," cried Priyamvada, in a beseeching tone; "you would break the spell."

Obeying the injunction of his dark cousin, Volmerange again bent his head.

"Now what do you see?"

"A circle of colour is forming at the bottom of the cup."

"Only one?"

"No, it is now double, and has all the colours of the prism."

"Two is not enough, — three are needed, one for Brahma, one for Vishnu, and one for Siva; look very carefully, I shall repeat the incantation," said Priyamvada, reassuming her curious attitude.

The third circle appeared, at first faint and pale, like the shadow of a rainbow seen by the side of the true one; soon, however, its outline became clear, and shone radiant and brilliant by the others.

"There are now three circles!" cried the Count, who in spite of his European incredulity, could not help being astonished at the appearance of the flaming rings, unexplained by any physical reason.

"The three rings are there," said Priyamvada; "the frame is ready. Spirits, bring him we wish to see. In whatever part of the world, and at whatever time he lived, were it before Adam, who is buried in the isle of Serendib, compel him to appear and to reveal himself, — a shadow if he be dead, a portrait if he be living."

These words, uttered in the most solemn tone, caused Volmerange to bend more eagerly over the cup; could he trust the efficacy of Priyamvada's magic incantations? His prejudices as a civilized man revolted at the thought, yet the effects she had already produced scarcely allowed of incredulity; in any case, his uncertainty would not last long.

At the bottom of the cup, within the space circumscribed by the three luminous rings, Volmerange saw, appearing in the depths of a vast distance, a point which approached rapidly, becoming clearer and clearer.

"Do you see anything appear?" asked Priyamvada of Volmerange.

"A man whose features I cannot yet make out is approaching towards me."

"When you see him more distinctly, endeavour to fix his features carefully in your mind, for I cannot twice bring up the spectre of the same person," added the young girl, gravely. The figure now became more defined, as if produced under the water by a mysterious brush. A flash passed through the cup, and Volmerange recognized unmistakably Xavier's pale, delicate face.

He uttered a cry of astonishment and rage; the milky cloud again filled the cup, the image became faint, and everything disappeared.

"Dolfos, one of the members of our Junta!" went on Volmerange, thunder-struck.

Dolfos was Xavier's true name, though it was under the latter pseudonym alone that Edith knew him. Xavier, or more properly Dolfos, could not have foreseen these hydromancist performances, and had thought by changing his name he could make darker still the sombre intrigue he had wrought.

Priyamvada, who appeared in no way surprised at the amazing result, poured back the Ganges water into the flagon from which she had drawn it.

"Now my dear lord may be avenged if he pleases," said the maiden; "my art has shown him the culprit."

"Listen, Priyamvada," roared the Count, as he drew himself up to his full height; "I shall follow you to India, and do whatever you please; my heart and my arm belong to you, in return for the service you have just rendered me. Now let me go. I can think of nothing but my vengeance."

"Go," replied Priyamvada; "be dread as Durga when he plunges his trident into the heart of vice, fierce as

Narsingha, the man lion, when he tears the entrails of Hiranycasipu."

She took the Count by the hand, and led him through devious windings, to a door that opened on the street.

When she returned, Daksha, who had watched the whole scene, concealed by the curtains, was standing in the centre of the hall, his chin in his hand, and his elbow resting in the other, in a meditative attitude. After a few moments he said to Priyamvada: —

"I think, maiden, you were wrong to let the dear lord go: suppose he should not come back?"

"He will come back," replied the girl, a smile full of witching and artless coquetry showing behind her diamond-studded nose-ring.

When Volmerange found himself in the street, he thought he must have been the plaything of a dream; how could he believe in such phantasmagoria? Was Dolfos really the culprit? A secret instinct convinced him that he was, although he had nothing else on which to base his belief.

But supposing he were guilty, how was Volmerange to prove it? The only creature who could have told the truth was now being carried out to sea, or at least so thought the Count, in the turbid waters of the

Thames. Again, where could he find Dolfos, whom he had lost sight of for two or three years, and whose manner of life he knew nothing of, for the man's cold and secret nature had always aroused Volmerange's antipathy. They had occasionally met, but had confined themselves to that strict politeness which borders on insult. Some love affairs in which Dolfos had been an unsuccessful rival of Volmerange, appeared to have left in his soul a deep rancour, which he carefully concealed, but which had awakened every evil feeling in his vile heart.

A further uncertainty tortured the Count: possibly Dolfos had acted in accordance with the orders of the Junta, and then, backed by the powerful association, he might escape his well-merited chastisement; no doubt some ship was already carrying him away towards an unknown country, and concealing him forever from his pursuer.

He had got so far in his reasoning, when suddenly, by one of those chances which are true in life though improbable in a novel, Dolfos, turning the corner of the street, found himself face to face with him.

At the sight of Volmerange, Dolfos understood that he knew all; he was terror-struck at the sight of

the livid face, in which flamed two glaring eyes, and threw himself back abruptly; but the Count's hand clutched his arm like a grappling-iron, and held him back.

"Dolfos," said the Count, "I know everything; do not attempt to lie; you belong to me, follow me."

The wretch tried to escape from the grasp of the strong hand, but failed.

"Shall I have to strike you in the open street, like the coward you are, to compel you to fight?" went on Volmerange; "I have the right to kill you, and yet I shall risk my life against yours, as if you were an honourable man. I can understand a man seducing a woman, for love excuses everything; but there is nothing more monstrous and abominable in hell than to ruin her coolly and hatefully: you have made me a murderer, and I now must kill you, — I owe it to Edith's memory."

"Very well, I shall follow you," replied Dolfos; "but let go my wrist, you are breaking it."

"No," replied Volmerange, "you would run away."

The Count called a passing carriage and made the pale and trembling Dolfos enter it before him

"Drive to ——," said the Count. It was a little

country-house, a cottage which he owned in the neighbourhood of Richmond.

Although the drive was rapid, it seemed long to the two enemies. Dolfos, cowering in a corner of the carriage, looked like a hyena driven to bay by a lion, while Volmerange watched him with sinister feelings. Volmerange was calm, Dolfos perturbed.

The cottage was at last reached; an old servant was in charge of the house, to which the Count rarely repaired with his friends, when he gave a bachelor party.

The cottage was planned discreetly: no one could look into the grounds, surrounded by high palings; there was no importunate neighbour; neither the breathings of love nor the yells of an orgy would awake any one's attention; on the other hand, two men might kill each other there quite comfortably. To one who had voluptuous intentions it was a Calypso's grotto; with sinister ones it became the cave of Cacus. I hope all this mythology will be forgiven me. Volmerange's intentions were not pleasant; hence the cottage became a cut-throat place.

Day was sinking, and the room into which Volmerange entered, driving Dolfos before him, was damp

and cold like a chamber in a tomb; it had not been opened for a long time.

Dolfos let himself fall into an arm-chair, and leaned his head on his hand; he was terribly cast down; although boldly imaginative, he lacked physical courage; he began to repent, as is the habit of cowards when found out. Although he had received orders from the Junta to keep Volmerange and Edith apart, he had unquestionably overstepped his powers in a most audacious fashion, and indulged too largely his own private hatred; he experienced the bitter, hopeless regret of unsuccessful rascality.

"Daniel, take that letter to the city," said Volmerange, after having folded the paper, to the old man whom he had called in; "it is in a great hurry."

The old servant went off, and when Volmerange heard the entrance door close, he said to Dolfos: —

"Now we can have it out together."

Then, livid as a spectre, his teeth set, his eyes bloodshot, he took from a trophy suspended from the wall, two swords of equal length, put them under his arm, and started for the garden; Dolfos followed him mechanically, as a criminal follows the executioner; he tried to scream, but his voice stuck in his dry throat;

besides, no one would have heard. He wanted to stop, to grovel on the ground, to resist passively; but he knew Volmerange would drive him or drag him along with his powerful hand, like a hook dragging a body to the charnel pit. So Dolfos, usually so eloquent and so crafty, walked on, mute and stupefied, for he had at once felt that prayer and falsehood were equally useless.

As they passed before a rustic hut, Volmerange entered it for a moment, and returned with a spade.

This ominous action made the blood of Dolfos run colder still. The pair thus proceeded to the very end of the grounds.

Once there, Volmerange stopped and said: —

"This place will do."

It was indeed very well arranged. The trees, which autumn had stripped of their leaves, and whose black limbs stood out against the crimson clouds of evening, formed at this place a sort of circle, apparently designed expressly for a duelling ground.

The Count, placing the two swords beyond the reach of Dolfos, took the spade and drew on the sand a parallelogram about as long as a man lying down; then he began to dig, throwing the earth to right and

left. Stiff with terror, Dolfos leaned against the tree, and in a faint voice said to Volmerange: —

"In God's name, what are you doing?"

"What am I doing?" answered Volmerange, without stopping his work; "I am digging your grave or mine, as it may chance, — the survivor will bury the other."

"That is horrible!" groaned Dolfos.

"I do not think so," went on Volmerange, with cruel irony; "I do not suppose that we intend to scratch each other merely. What I am doing is convenient and decent. However, you dig in your turn," he added, emerging from the half-made grave; "it is not right that I alone should tire myself out. We must both make the bed in which one of us is to lie."

So saying, he handed the spade to Dolfos, who, trembling all over, made five or six attempts to dig, but succeeded in removing only a small quantity of earth.

"Come, let me finish," said Volmerange, taking the spade back; "though you are such a good actor, you would not do for the part of the grave-digger in 'Hamlet,' — you dig badly, my master."

The night had almost fallen when the Count had finished his dreadful work.

"Come, that is dug deep enough. Now for the swords," said the Count, throwing one to Dolfos and keeping the other.

"There is no more light," cried the wretch; "are we to slay each other in the dark?"

"There is always light enough to kill each other; passing from life to death is an easy transition. Dark as it may be, we can always feel a sword penetrating our bodies," said the Count, lunging fiercely at Dolfos, who uttered a groan.

"I have hit you," said the Count, "for the point of my sword is wet."

Dolfos immediately lunged hard at the Count.

Volmerange parried the thrust by a prompt retreat, and binding his adversary's sword with his own, made it fly from his hands.

Seeing himself lost, Dolfos threw himself on the ground, crouched like a tiger, seized Volmerange round the legs, and made him fall.

Then began a dreadful struggle; bound by the mad grasp of Dolfos, whom cowardice and despair turned into a raging wild beast, Volmerange was unable to use

his sword; he had tried to thrust it into Dolfos' back, even at the risk of running it through his own heart after piercing his adversary, but he could not manage it, and the sword escaped him. With his hand now free, he seized his enemy by the throat.

The two adversaries had fallen near the open grave; as they rolled on the ground in that cannibal-like struggle, their turnings and twistings brought them near the open grave, into which they rolled, without letting go, pell-mell with the fallen earth. Only, Dolfos was underneath. Volmerange's fingers sank deep into his flesh and strangled him like a Spanish garrote; the wretch foamed at the mouth, a low rattling was heard in his throat, his limbs stiffened; soon the convulsions ceased, and Volmerange, freeing himself from the dead man's grasp, sprang out of the grave, saying: —

"A very obliging corpse — he has buried himself."

Taking the spade he hastily covered up the body, smoothed the ground carefully, and trampled it down.

"Now that I have settled this matter, let me return to Priyamvada, and together we will forsake this old Europe, where I leave two dead bodies."

XV

WE left the "Lovely Jenny" issuing from the Thames into the open. Probably the captain did not know whither they were bound, for when the great waves of the open sea began to lave the bulwarks of the ship, he respectfully asked Sidney, who, sunk in thought, was seated upon a coil of rope: —

"Where are we going to, sir?"

"You will find out when we get there, my dear Captain Peppercull."

"Oh! I did not ask through curiosity," answered the latter, "but the wheelman has to know whether to put the helm to port or starboard."

"That is right," answered Sir Arthur Sidney, with a faint smile, though he still named no course.

"The wind," went on Peppercull, "has hauled since yesterday; it is fair for a clear course down Channel and out into the Atlantic; but if you happen to have business in the Baltic or the Arctic, why, by beating to windward we can manage to get there."

"Since the wind is taking us down Channel," said Sidney, with an air of carelessness admirably assumed if it was not genuine, "let us go where the wind takes us."

The captain at once gave orders to have the "Lovely Jenny" kept away; in a twinkling the yards were hauled, and the ship, with a strong and steady free wind, dashed rapidly on between two lines of foam.

Seeing that Sidney kept silence, Peppercull did not think fit to attempt to enter into conversation, and respectfully withdrew some distance away.

Sidney called Jack, Macgill's friend, who was busy splicing a rope.

"Show to my cabin the woman we picked up last night."

"I shall bring her to your lordship," said Jack, disappearing down the hatchway like an opera demon down a trap-door.

While Jack fetched Edith, — who was lying in a hammock between decks, — Sidney, his brow darkened by deep thought, proceeded to his cabin to meet the young woman.

But when the cabin door opened, it was not the drowning woman whose white form had flashed through the darkness that appeared, but a slender young fellow

of medium stature, wearing a sailor's jersey and oil-skin coat; the delicate, regular features of his oval face were extraordinarily pale; the sunken eyes shone with the light of fever, and the colourless lips were scarcely distinguishable from the rest of the skin; shame mingled with his sadness, and when Sidney looked at him, a faint blush rose to his cheeks.

Sidney's glance betrayed his astonishment at seeing a sailor lad when he expected a woman, but Jack, coming up behind the supposed youth, understood his chief's surprise and put an end to it.

"When we drew the lady from the water, sir, she had on nothing but a muslin wrapper, and as we did not happen to have a woman's dress on board, I put by her hammock that red jersey and the oil-skin coat; that is how the lady we picked up turns out to be a handsome sailor lad."

"That will do, Jack; leave us," said Sir Arthur Sidney, with a gesture of command.

Sidney, left alone with Edith, fixed upon her a scrutinising glance, as piercing as that of an eagle; it was less a glance than a luminous beam that seemed to seek within the head and the heart the thought in the brain and the feeling in the bosom.

Edith remained impassible during this examination, which was no doubt favourable to her, for Sidney rose with as much respectful politeness as if he had been in a drawing-room, took her by the tips of the fingers, and said, as he led her to a sofa, provided with cushions, that stood in the corner of the cabin : —

"I beg you will sit down, madam ; you appear weak and ill, and any one who has not yet got his sea legs finds it difficult to stand."

The fact is the "Lovely Jenny," going free, plunged into the sea like a spirited horse, and the level of the floor changed constantly.

Led by Sidney, Edith let herself fall rather than she sat down upon the sofa.

There was a moment's silence, which Sidney broke with his harmonious, calm voice, made softer still by an accent of pity.

"I will not ask you, madam, whether it was crime or despair that cast you into the Thames on that dreadful stormy night. By a miracle there passed near you a boat filled with people hastening in the darkness to perform a mysterious work. You fell from heaven into that secret ; by a most unexpected chance you upset the best-laid precautions, which no one should

have seen, and no one must tell of. A blow from an oar would have hurled you back into the water — my men awaited but a sign from me."

"Then why did you not make it?" interrupted Edith, putting her diaphanous hands to her reddened eyes.

"I did not do it," continued Sidney, "for something called out to me; it seemed to me that to give back to death a being whom a marvellous chance was keeping alive, would have been cold barbarity, a sort of impiety towards fate. But I am bound to tell you that the life I give you back, I cannot give you the free use of, — not at least, until the great work in which I am engaged has been finished. The vessel on which we are will not stop before it has reached the most distant seas; until that time comes, you must be dead to the world."

"You need not fear, sir; I have no desire to come back to life."

"The costume you have put on," continued Sidney, "you shall keep for some time. Later, I shall tell you when to change it. You need have no fear; in spite of our sinister and gloomy appearance, we are honest men, working for a great end."

As he uttered these words, Sidney's eyes lighted up, his brow became radiant, his whole face was illumined;

but soon, as if ashamed of this effusion, he resumed his cool look and his cold attitude.

"You may trust to my honour, madam; I have not saved you from death to devote you to infamy; since murder or suicide threw you into the river, you must emerge from it radiant and pardoned; with me danger becomes glorious, and if you die in the fulfilment of the work we are engaged in, future ages will bless your name."

"Oh! yes," answered Edith; "now that every tie which connected me with life is broken, I feel I can live for devotion only; my life is over; I have neither end, hope, nor reason for living; everything is impossible to me, even death, since God suspended me over the abyss without letting me sink into it. Do as you please with your handmaid; let your will be mine; let your soul take the place of my empty heart; be my thought; I forswear myself from this day, and forget who I am; I shall forget even my own name, and take the one you shall give me; a phantom may be baptised at will; I shall stand and go on until the day when you shall say to me: 'Spectre, I need thee no longer; lie down again in thy tomb.'"

"I accept you," said Sir Arthur Sidney, in an almost

solemn and religious tone; "and since, poor broken young soul, you give yourself unreservedly, and devote yourself to our task with ardour and faith, I promise you, if not happiness, at least rest. Henceforth you shall inhabit this little room by my cabin, and in the eyes of the crew, which has not seen you in your woman's dress, you shall pass for my cabin boy."

Edith was installed in the small cabin; her duties, more apparent than real, were limited to fetching a book for Sidney, or bringing him his spy-glass; the rest of the time, leaning on the rail or perched in the top, she let her glance wander over the clouds and the ocean, which seemed small to her by the side of her grief. The vessel sailed on, enclosed within that brazen circle which the horizon at sea traces around ships; the sun rose and set; the white horses shook their foaming manes; the dolphins played in the ship's wake like tritons and sirens; from time to time a grey streak, bordered with foam, shone far away to port, looking like a cloud-bank coloured by a sunbeam; albatrosses, sleeping in their flight, soared above the masts or skimmed the waves, one wing in the water, the other in the air; the farther the ship pro-

ceeded, the brighter became the sky, as the Northern fogs were left behind like vanishing spectres.

But soon everything disappeared, — the birds and the outlines of the distant shores; and nothing was visible but the sea and the sky in their monotonous grandeur and sterile agitation. The Venetian song says, with wondrous melancholy, that it is sad to go to sea without love: it is both true and beautiful, for love alone can fill the infinite; but no doubt the song did not mean a hopeless, broken love, like that of Edith for Volmerange. Deep sadness filled the poor girl's heart; she could not help thinking of the happy life she might have led, for which God and society had meant her, and which a complication of wicked intrigues had made impossible; she thought of Lord and Lady Harley, and the dreadful despair of her noble father and kind mother; the tears flowed silently down her beautiful pale face, more bitter than the ocean into which they fell.

By a strange contradiction, which will not astonish women, she loved Volmerange more than ever since that terrible night; his fierce violence proved the greatness of his love; his implacable rigour pleased her; had he been more indulgent she would have thought him cold; a man must love madly when he believes he has

the right to slay. What hopes of happiness must Volmerange have entertained, since he could not bear their being swept away! What was he doing now, desperate, filled with remorse, no doubt compelled to flee? What effect had the sinister and mysterious catastrophe produced in society? Such were the questions, ever the same, and answered in a hundred ways, which Edith asked herself as the "Lovely Jenny," sometimes driven by a strong breeze, sometimes coaxing into her sails the faintest of airs, proceeded towards her mysterious destination.

Benedict, on his part, thought a great deal of Miss Annabel, and every time he passed Edith on deck, the two looked sadly at each other, for each knew the other was in grief.

At last Madeira hove in sight. Sidney sent a boat ashore to renew his supplies, and to purchase a complete outfit for Edith, — gowns, linen, shawl, bonnets, — nothing was lacking; it was like a bridal trousseau. Yet she was not permitted to leave off her sailor-boy's dress.

Whether Benedict had thought it his duty to obey the oath which he had once taken, or whether Sidney had really converted him to his views, — he had ceased

to rebel against the strange kidnapping which had snatched him away so suddenly from happiness, and did not seem to bear any grudge against his friend.

They would spend long days in the cabin, leaning on the swinging table, covered with papers and mathematical instruments. Sir Arthur Sidney, after long meditation, would draw on a slip of paper complicated designs covered with algebraic signs and reference letters, which Benedict carefully copied in ink with the greatest possible accuracy ; sometimes before he copied them he would make remarks, to which Sidney listened with deep attention, and which occasionally brought about some change in the original plan.

Soon the two friends passed from the drawing of plans to the making of a model on a small scale ; they gravely cut small pieces of wood, as long as a finger, the use of which it would have been difficult to guess. When they were all cut Sidney put together very skilfully the separate numbered pieces which Benedict handed him, the latter appearing to take an equally lively interest in the work. After a month of this constant labour they turned out a boat one foot long, externally exactly like those which compose the flotillas that children sail on the basins of the parks or the

royal gardens, — but internally it was filled with wheels, tubes, and bulkheads.

The result, though apparently puerile, seemed to delight the two friends greatly; Sidney uttered a cry of satisfaction as he fixed the last board.

"I think we have succeeded," said he, "at least as much as we may be certain of in theory."

"We must test it," answered Arundel.

"Nothing is easier," replied Sidney, ringing a bell placed near him.

Emerging from the forecastle, where he was busy with a friend, in making a comparative study of the specific strength of rum, Jack presently appeared and waited, twisting his hat between his fingers, for Sir Arthur's orders.

"Bring me a tub full of water," said Sidney to Jack, who, surprised at the strange order, asked to have it repeated.

"Your honour said a tub full of water?"

"Yes, what is there surprising in that?" answered Sidney.

"Nothing, sir; I had not heard you correctly," answered Jack. "I will fetch it at once."

A few minutes later he reappeared with his friend

Macgill carrying between them the tub full of water, which they carefully placed at the entrance of the cabin.

When the two sailors had gone, Sidney carefully took the little boat and placed it in the water as seriously as a child launching a ship of war in a basin.

But curiously enough, the boat, instead of floating, as might have been expected, gradually sank and disappeared under the water in the tub; a performance that appeared to give great satisfaction to both Sidney and Benedict, — though boats are not usually built to sink.

Sidney, who noticed with enthusiasm that the little boat had not sunk to the bottom, cried out: —

"Look, Benedict, it keeps just at the right depth. My calculations were correct; now I am sure of everything."

His eyes flashed, and his nostrils dilated with noble pride; but soon recovering his customary coolness, he pulled up his sleeve, plunged his bare arm into the water, drew out the little boat, and carefully locked it up after drying it. Benedict also seemed very much pleased at the success of the operation, and from that day a ray of hope lightened his sadness.

As for poor Edith, who was not in the secret of the craft, her melancholy had turned into a dull resignation; as I have said, she had no other distraction than the prospect of ocean.

The voyage had lasted nearly three months, and did not seem to be drawing to an end; the Canary and Cape Verde Islands had disappeared in the far distance. On passing Ascension Island Macgill and Jack were sent in the boat to the post-office cave, and found in the bottle suspended from the ceiling a roll of paper covered with enigmatical signs, which they handed to Sir Arthur Sidney.

Sir Arthur easily read the curious writing, after having placed upon it a grille which he drew from his pocket-book; he appeared satisfied with the contents of the note, for he said to Benedict: "It is all right, everything is going on satisfactorily."

A few days after they had passed Ascension Island, a small gray cloud began to rise from the sea, like a wisp of mist drawn up by the sun; soon it became somewhat denser, and its outlines showed more plainly on the clear horizon. With a telescope it could be plainly made out; it assuredly was not a cloud, but land; the island rose gradually from the waters, and,

owing to the curve of the sea, showed as yet only its mountain summits; soon, however, it was seen in its entirety, motionless and sombre, and girdled with foam, in the centre of space.

Huge precipitous rocks, two thousand feet high, overhung in volcanic masses the sea, which beat at their feet and rolled with mad anger into the caves hollowed out by its attacks; it seemed to be conscious of what it was doing, so fiercely did the billows return to the charge. The cloud-capped tops of these granite masses, shrouded at their feet by a mist of spray, were tipped with sunbeams; the gigantic steeps and bare slopes, on which the lava of extinct volcanoes ran in furrows, like the cicatrices of former wounds, the summits, worn by torrential rains, formed a picture at once majestically savage and sinister; it had a grandly horrible look. The rocks seemed to have fallen from heaven on the day the giants endeavoured to scale it; they were still shattered and burned by the thunder-bolts; evidently something superhuman was going on there, — some incredible vengeance, a torture like that of the cross of the Caucasus; involuntarily the eye sought upon the summits the colossal silhouette of a chained Prometheus. Indeed it would not have taken

much fancy to see in the wind-shaped cloud which hovered above the broken crest, like a human form, the fierce vulture itself.

In point of fact a Prometheus, as great as his prototype, was suffering there, crucified for five years past by strength and power, as in the tragedy of Aeschylus.

The whole crew was on deck. Sir Arthur Sidney gazed at the black island with an unfathomable glance of mingled shame, grief, and hope; he grasped mutely the hand of Benedict standing by him and apparently also a prey to deep emotion. Captain Peppercull had left a gallon of rum half emptied, a most striking mark of his mental perturbation.

Orders were given to cast anchor opposite the town, the grey houses of which showed within the deep ravine between the mountains, open at this place alone, for everywhere else the hills surround the island like a girdle of towers and bastions.

Edith, who had lived aboard the "Lovely Jenny" in absolute isolation, and had no knowledge of the distance traversed by the ship, moved by curiosity at the sight of land, timidly approached Sir Arthur Sidney, who, unable to detach his glance from the prospect

before him, placed his hand on her arm, for he paid no attention to her. She said to him, in a somewhat trembling voice, for she never spoke to him first: —

"What is the name of that island?"

"That island," replied Sir Arthur Sidney, in a singular tone, as he came out of his reverie, "that island is called St. Helena."

XVI

"ST. HELENA," sighed Edith, whose eyes were wet with tears.

"Yes," answered Sidney, noting with interest the effect produced on Edith by the magical name.

"Oh! what a dreadful place," continued Edith, clasping her hands.

"Dreadful, indeed," cried Sir Arthur, his eyes still fixed upon her.

"It would be cruel to take criminals to such a spot."

"Yet they have transported genius there," said Sir Benedict Arundel, taking part in the conversation.

"Shame on our nation," went on Sidney, as if to himself, and sunk in deep thought; "but patience —"

He stopped as if he were afraid of saying too much, then resumed his impassible look.

A few minutes later he ordered Captain Peppercull to get the boat ready, and returned to the cabin with Edith and Sir Benedict Arundel.

Sidney took Edith's hand, and in the presence of Benedict said to her: —

"You have given me the right to make use of your devotion and intelligence in carrying out my end; you promised to trust me blindly, and to walk with closed eyes on the road in which I shall place you, even though it should end in an abyss."

"I have said so; my life is yours," answered the young woman.

"Very good," continued Sir Arthur; "at present, however, I do not mean to make so serious a demand upon you. The time has come for you to leave off your sailor dress; go to your cabin, in which I have had put everything you will need."

Edith rose and went out.

Sir Arthur Sidney, left alone with Benedict, crossed his arms upon his breast, as if to keep down the beating of his heart; then he opened them to his friend and said to him: —

"Brother, in case we never again meet in this world, let us embrace."

Benedict advanced towards Sidney, and the two friends clasped each other for a moment.

"When everything is ready," said Sidney, drawing Benedict to the port-hole, "you will cut down that little tree which twists and blows in the wind at the

top of that black rock; it can be seen a long distance at sea. I am going to Tristan d'Acunha, or to the African coast, at the mouth of the Coanga river, it is nearer, to build the boat. It will take me two months. During these two months the 'Lovely Jenny' will cruise in these seas, and then we shall strike our great blow."

"History will be amazed at it, and never —"

He was going to say more when Edith entered. Benedict and Sidney remained astounded at her beauty; her man's dress had until then prevented both the friends — absorbed, the one by a great thought, the other by a great grief — from noting how very adorable and charming Miss Edith was.

The time that had elapsed had, if not appeased, at least softened her grief; the only traces of the horrible catastrophe were the delicate pallor of her cheeks, and a light azure tint on the temples, that brought out the distinction of her lovely face by making the soul within it in some sort visible.

She was dressed with the most charming simplicity: a gown of white India muslin, dotted with little sprays of flowers, set off her young and supple figure, and fell in abundant folds over her hips; a bonnet of fine

Manila straw, trimmed with rose-coloured ribbons, framed in the soft oval of her face; and over her shoulders was draped a China shawl.

As she caught the admiring glances of Sidney and Benedict, Miss Edith felt her pale cheeks blush; the woman was being re-born in her.

"You are lovely," Sidney could not help saying. "Now you shall leave with Benedict; you shall pass for his sister or his wife. I think his wife would be better, and that is what you shall be called. You will take a house in Jamestown, and a country-house as near Longwood as possible; later on Benedict will tell you what you have to do."

"I shall obey," replied the young woman, somewhat troubled at the thought of passing for Benedict's wife, and living alone under the same roof with a young and handsome man.

Then with the humility of a pure soul, ever unjust to itself, she said to herself that she had no right to consider the situation equivocal, and that, after all, Xavier's mistress had no right to be so very scrupulous.

"Come," said Sidney, taking Edith by the hands and leading her to Benedict, "it is time for the bride and bridegroom to go: the boat is ready alongside."

Then with his characteristically serene smile he said to his friend: —

"Confess that if I took a bride from you, I have given you back one who is no less beautiful."

Benedict turned pale at this embarrassing remark, but restrained himself, for he knew that nothing was farther from Arthur's thought than even the most innocent sarcasm; and looking at Miss Edith he could not help thinking she was in no wise inferior to Miss Annabel Vyvyan.

Edith, without being quite conscious of it, felt a certain pleasure in again wearing the dress of her sex. The white gown, the fine straw bonnet, the knots of ribbon brightened her in spite of herself; the thought of landing was pleasant. A long sea passage is so monotonous that even the most arid and inhospitable place is to be preferred to that of a ship; and for three months past Edith had seen nothing but sky and water.

When she found herself in the stern-sheets of the boat, by Sir Benedict Arundel's side, she experienced a sense of comfort and freedom, and a brighter expression illumined her lovely face, usually so melancholy.

The sea was fairly smooth, and the boat, pulled by six vigorous seamen, drew near the shore, shot alongside

the landing-place, and Benedict held out his hand to Edith to help her out. Jack and Saunders loaded on the shoulders of a pair of copper-coloured fellows the boxes, which Sir Arthur had filled with everything necessary for the installation of the young couple.

Saunders soon found a suitable house in the town, and there the young couple, after having satisfied the authorities by the exhibition of perfectly regular papers, provided by the far-sighted Sidney, settled down under the name of Mr. and Mrs. Smith.

The tale told by Jack was that Mrs. Smith, who was going to India with her husband, to visit the great indigo estates they possessed in that country, had been so tried by the sea that she had asked to rest, for a month or two, on the nearest habitable land met with, before she resumed a voyage from which she suffered so much.

That very evening Sir Arthur Sidney set sail, and the "Lovely Jenny" soon disappeared in the blue distance. Benedict, leaning at the window of his new dwelling, which looked out on the sea, followed with his eyes the vessel, that grew smaller and smaller, until a gull's wing would have sufficed to conceal it.

The house inhabited by the supposed husband and wife was exactly like a Chelsea or Ramsgate house,

thanks to the obstinacy peculiar to the English race, which neither distance nor climate can overcome. The walls were of that yellow brick which in London worries the stranger's eyes; and the internal arrangements were exactly the same as if the house were built opposite Temple Bar, or near Trinity Church. The only concession to the climate consisted of a striped blue awning, shading the entrance door, — and the substitution of Philippine mattings for woollen carpets.

In the arid, dry garden was a row of tamarisks, the delicate, verdigrised, lace-like leaves of which trembled at the least breath, and cast a slight shade upon the dusty sand, in which languished a few thirsty flowers cultivated by a Malay gardener.

Sir Benedict Arundel and Miss Edith felt very strange when they found themselves alone at table, placed, in conjugal fashion, opposite each other, and served by a silent attendant. This sudden intimacy, springing from their supposed marriage, and perfectly natural under those circumstances, amazed and frightened them, though possibly it also unconsciously pleased them. The combination of unusual events, which had brought about this impossible situation, had probably not occurred since the earth began revolving round the sun; and even now,

they had not yet fathomed its full strangeness, for Arundel and Miss Edith did not know that they were, the one a wifeless husband, the other a husbandless wife; for Benedict, drawn away by Sidney, had not entered the church of St. Margaret; and the two fair brides alone had met under the dark porch.

What they did know was that they were eight thousand miles from home, on the gloomy island of St. Helena, compelled by the remorseless working-out of a mysterious scheme to live day and night under the same roof, — both young, handsome, and loveless.

The meal over, they visited the house more carefully and saw that there was but a single bedroom. Edith, with her English modesty, blushed; Benedict stopping on the threshold, and understanding the embarrassment of his supposed wife, said: —

"I shall have a hammock hung up for myself in the upper room."

Edith, reassured, smiled gently, and threw her scarf on the bed, by way of taking possession.

Then they went down into the garden, where they walked up and down the long tamarisk walk, with the satisfaction of people who for three months have had their walks bounded by the narrow quarter-deck of a ship.

Edith's arm rested on Arundel's, for she stumbled, unaccustomed as she now was to walking; and certainly Annabel and Volmerange would have been amazed at seeing the couple traversing the solitary walk in apparent conjugal intimacy.

A few days thus passed; Edith had made up her mind to consider Benedict as a brother; on his part, Benedict accepted her as a sister; yet a greater attraction than they were aware of was drawing them towards each other.

Spending almost the whole of their days together, they ended by confiding in each other; Benedict told Edith of his love for Annabel, and the way she had been separated from him: Edith told him of her marriage in the sombre church of St. Margaret.

"What, was it your carriage that crossed mine before the portal?"

"Yes," replied Edith.

"What a strange coincidence,—the wedding which everything seemed to lead up to, did not take place; those who were to be united, were separated, and those who were separated are united; couples are made and unmade in spite of choice and will. We who are not in love with each other, for our hearts are given away,

are here in the same house, alone, free, thousands of miles from those we love and whom we shall never again see."

"That is true," replied Edith, thoughtfully; "fate has indeed strange caprices."

The supposed husband and wife henceforth had one of those convenient subjects of conversation in which a growing inclination finds a way of making indirect confessions, which may be confirmed or retracted according to whether they succeed or not. Benedict spoke of Annabel and her beauty, in words which, after all, might have applied to Edith equally well; he vented his regrets and painted his passion in the liveliest manner, and in burning language. His companion, attentive and deeply interested, listened to his passionate eloquence with the less hesitation that it was not directly intended for her.

She replied to it by protestations of love for Volmerange, whose anger she acknowledged having justly deserved, for not having been entirely frank with him. In these ambiguous conversations each showed his tenderness, his love, his capacity for devotion, and displayed fearlessly the treasures of his soul. Under the protection of the names of Annabel and Volmerange,

they indulged in subtle amorous metaphysics; their passion, unknown to themselves, and concealed behind that mask, enjoyed the freedom of a masked ball. Little by little Edith was taking Annabel's place, and Benedict that of Volmerange.

It should be said for them that they were not conscious of the change, and yielded the more willingly to the charm attracting them one to the other, because they believed it perfectly safe, and were sure they could never love each other. If Benedict had been asked whether he loved Annabel as much as ever he would have replied, "Yes," with heartfelt sincerity; and had Edith been questioned, she would also have sworn that her passion for Volmerange was in no wise diminished.

A few weeks passed by with magical swiftness. Before parting at night they would shake hands in fraternal fashion, and each withdraw to his room with a sigh and a sort of indefinable sadness. Once Benedict said laughingly to Miss Edith: —

"Mrs. Smith, I claim my rights as a husband; I should like to kiss your brow."

The young woman bent forward without a word, and offered her head submissively to Benedict's lips; the kiss lighted half upon her satin brow, half upon her

silky, scented hair. Then with a movement like a frightened doe, she abruptly returned to her room and closed the door.

That night Benedict did not sleep well.

Meanwhile, however, Sir Arthur's instructions were being literally carried out; a country-house, as near over the dwelling of the illustrious prisoner as the English allowed, had been rented, and the pretended Mrs. Smith withdrew to it, on the pretext that she lacked air in the narrow confines of Jamestown.

Benedict remained in town for some days, apparently busy with commercial affairs. Edith, accompanied by a mulatto servant, went every day, at the same hour, as Benedict had told her to do, for a walk which took her as close as possible to Longwood.

"Especially do not forget to carry or wear in your straw bonnet, a bouquet of violets," Benedict told her as he left, and as there happened to be a bed of violets in the garden of the country-house, the order was easily carried out.

For several days Edith's walk proved barren of results; the prisoner, ill and weaker, did not come out.

Impatient to learn the result of Edith's perambula-

tions, and perhaps also impelled by some other motive, Sir Benedict Arundel had joined her in the country-house, and every time she returned from her walk, he questioned her eagerly, but the reply was invariably the same, —

"I have seen nothing but the eagles soaring in the air, and the albatrosses over the waters."

Finally, one day at a turn in the road, Edith found herself face to face with the imperial captive, who seemed to walk with difficulty, followed at a distance by his trusted companions, and guarded from afar by red-coated sentinels. A marble pallor covered his thin features, which, accentuated by grief, had resumed the beautiful lines of youth.

He looked at Edith and smiling with irresistible grace, took two or three steps towards her and bowed. In presence of the fallen god, Edith, who might perhaps have preserved her self-possession in the radiant light surrounding the emperor, was troubled, turned pale, and almost fainted.

The hero advanced towards her and said to her in a grave, sombre voice, like an inhabitant of Olympus speaking to a mortal, —

"Madam, reassure yourself."

And noting the bouquet of violets she held in her hand, —

"It is long since I have seen such fresh flowers."

Mechanically Edith bowed and held them out to him.

"Their scent is sweet, but less sweet than that of the violets of France," said Cæsar, handing back the flowers to the young woman, after having breathed in their perfume. Then he bowed with noble majesty, and resumed his way.

Dazzled by this imperial vision, Edith returned to the country-house, and to Benedict's question answered, —

"At last I have seen him."

"What did he say? repeat it word for word."

"He said the scent of the violets was sweet, but less sweet than that of the violets of France. That was all."

Benedict turned pale, so deeply was he moved by these simple words. Without making any reply he took a telescope and an axe, and started for the rock on which the tree pointed out by Sir Arthur Sidney showed its contorted silhouette.

He scanned the ocean with his glass. An almost imperceptible little white dot — was it a gull or a flake of foam? — alone broke the blue solitude of ocean.

"It is well," said Benedict.

And he struck the trunk of the tree with the axe; very soon he had cut down the tree, which fell from the top of the rock into the sea, with a dull, lugubrious sound.

XVII

AT some distance from Arungabad, in India, at about the same time as these events were happening on St. Helena, silent shadows were gliding, on a moonless night, through the reeds and the jungle on the banks of the Godavari, in the direction of an old, half-ruined pagoda, formerly dedicated to Siva, but abandoned since the English conquest. Nature, emboldened by solitude, was reasserting its rights over man's handiwork; the dust collected in the hollows of the carvings, and wetted by the rains formed a loam for the seeds brought by the winds; wall plants had clung with their tendrils, their roots, and their thorns; the roots of the shrubs, forcing themselves into the cracks of the stones, had slowly separated the blocks; mangroves, favoured by the damp, multiplied their leafy arches around; the thick, luxuriant, vigorous vegetation of India was little by little concealing the monument, and turning the pyramid into a hill.

Faintly seen through the darkness, with its broken outlines and its crest of brushwood, the ruined pagoda had a formidable and monstrous aspect. The temple of the god of destruction, itself destroyed, spoke, silently, with sinister eloquence.

The main door, closed by palisades formed of boards, by fallen earth, and an inextricable interlacing of vegetation, led to the belief that the building was deserted; yet lights occasionally appeared, moving past the half-filled openings, and indicated that something was going on in the interior. The shadows I have mentioned proceeded towards one part of the wall, into which they crawled and vanished. A huge stone, which had been moved out of its place, gave ingress, and through secret passages, cut within the thickness of the walls, the centre of the pagoda was reached.

At the end of a vast hall, supported by squatty columns, circled by granite rings and wearing, like women, triple ropes of carved pearls, the capitals formed of four elephant's-heads, stood, in a niche framed in by a rich border of arabesques, the statue of the god Siva,—a very old idol, rendered still more terrible by its archaic form. It breathed anger and vengeance; in two of its four arms it held a whip and a

trident, and a collar of death's-heads fell upon its breast; by its side Durga, its hideous spouse, rolled her cross eyes, gnashed her hippopotamus teeth, and stretched out her hands provided with claws, and while twisting her body, bound with serpents, crushed the monster Mahishasura, which tried to enfold her in its loathsome clasp.

Set within the walls, innumerable horrible figures, symbols of struggle or destruction, grimaced at the spectator; here the monstrous Mana-Pralaya, with a beast's-head, swallowing a whole city in his enormous mouth; there, Arddha-Nari, with a chaplet of skulls and chains, fiercely brandishing a sword; elsewhere Maha-Kali, holding in each of his four hands a head cut off; Mahadeva, with a river flowing from his brain, and bracelets made of vipers, was struggling with the deformed Tripurasura, while Garuda beat its wings, and sharpened its parrot-like beak and its eagle's-talons.

This was all that could be made out by the light of the lamp hanging before the statue of Siva; in the depths of the hall, filled with ruddy shadows, the eye could only make out, beyond the circle of light, vague forms, inexplicable interlacings, a hideous mingling of legs, dragon's-heads, and monsters of all kinds.

Within the circle of light, were grouped on tiger or gazelle skins, extraordinary and fantastic-looking beings, whose white eyebrows and beards brought out strikingly their dark complexions. The Brahmin cord hanging around their necks marked their caste; some of the more austere wore in lieu of it a serpent's-skin; all were ascetically lean, — through their open tunics could be seen their dried breasts, with their ribs protruding like those of a skeleton. They remained motionless, muttering prayers, and appeared to be awaiting, with Hindoo phlegm, some important personage who had not arrived.

Behind them was a confused, copper-coloured crowd, the first rows of which alone were visible in the faint red light of the lamp; the rest were speedily lost in the shadows. From time to time a new-comer disappeared silently in some group.

At last there was a stir; the crowd opened up, and soon appeared on the spot where the light of the lamp shone most brilliantly, three new-comers, whose arrival was received with murmurs of satisfaction. The one was an old Brahmin, as dried up and yellow as a mummy, with inspired, flaming eyes, wearing a muslin robe down to his heels. The second was a young

girl, as beautiful as Sakountala or Vasatensena; a transparent veil half concealed her rich costume, the embroideries and spangles of which sparkled through the gauze; as she walked, her necklets, her bracelets and anklets rattled with metallic sound. The third was a handsome young man, fairer than the girl, whose eyes were peculiar in being dark-blue; he wore a Mahratta warrior's dress, but much richer and more ornamented; a steel coat-of-mail protected his breast and fell to the bottom of his yellow tunic; full red trousers, caught at the ankles, and a muslin turban rolled around a steel helmet completed his dress. He wore golden bracelets, a curved sabre with velvet sheath, enriched with gold and precious stones. On his left arm he carried a buckler of hippopotamus-skin, studded with metal bosses; in his right hand he held a long musket, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and silver.

The old Brahmin was, as the reader has no doubt guessed, the same Daksha whose acquaintance we made in London; the lady was unaccountably like Priyamvada, and as for the Mahratta warrior, his features and his blue eyes proved him, in spite of his disguise, to be Volmerange, the European, a member of many clubs

in London, a descendant of the kings of the Lunar dynasty.

Daksha advanced towards the three leanest and most dried up Brahmins, and taking Volmerange by the hand, led him under the lamp, the light of which formed a sort of halo around his head, and presented him to the personages who appeared to be the most prominent in the assembly.

"He has the look of a Pradjati," murmured the spectators, delighted with Volmerange's fine appearance; "he looks like one of the first ten creatures that issued from the hands of Brahma."

Volmerange was indeed very handsome in his singular and picturesque costume.

"Sarngarava, Saradouata, and you, Canoua," said the old Brahmin, "I have brought him of whom I spoke, the descendant of the Douchmantas and Barahtas. He alone — so the gods, touched by my long penance, have revealed to me — he alone can bring back the former splendour of our land; he it is who shall drive away the coarse barbarians, — Englishmen who profane the waters of the Ganges, speak to pariahs, prevent widows from burning themselves alive as decency requires, who make their belly the tool of their life, and — a piece

of monstrosity that calls for vengeance, an abominable impiety — who dare to feed on the sacred flesh of the ox and the cow."

This last remark caused a thrill of horror to run through the assembly; the Brahmins raised their eyes to the ceiling, and a low muttering of imprecations sounded in the dark depths of the pagoda. The gods of granite, partially lighted by the quivering gleams of the lamp, seemed to frown and move on their pedestals.

"Is everything ready for the revolt?" asked Daksha; "are the weapons, horses, and elephants collected?"

"The crypts of the pagoda, the existence of which is unknown to any one outside our sacred college, are filled with muskets, lances, and arrows; the Mahratta chiefs, who are not as well tamed as the European barbarians imagine, have furnished us with horses; fifty trained war elephants with their howdahs, camped in the centre of a forest impenetrable to any who are not acquainted with its recesses, are awaiting the signal," answered Sarngarava; "the province will rise like one man."

"Oh! venerable Trimourti, Vishnu, Brahma, and Siva, thanks be to thee for allowing me to live until

this day, old and broken though I am," said Daksha, whose withered hands shook with pleasure. "We shall succeed, I am certain of it; the celestial powers will assist our enterprise; Brahma reveals the future to me; the god of war, in his last avatar, has assumed the human form, and comes to our help from the West, riding on a divine eagle, greater and stronger than the bird Garuda, which holds the lightning in its talons, and with its iron beak slays the battalions overthrown by the wind of its wings; that god shall shoot seven arrows at the English, who will flee terrified, and we shall become masters of the seven douipas, of which the world consists, as may be seen in the holy book of the Pouranas."

This curious address, delivered with an accent of deep conviction, produced a great effect upon the assembly. Priyamvada in particular, was delighted, and thought she already saw arriving the marvellous bird, bearing the hero seated upon its back.

"Barahta, we shall set thee again on the throne of thy ancestors," said Saradouata, "swear to fight with us to your last breath, and if you are successful to stay everywhere the slaying of the sacred animals."

"I swear it," replied Volmerange, in Hindoostanee.

"It is well," said the Brahmin Sarngarava. "And now, people, listen. He who stands before you is Barahta, a descendant of Douchmanta, the most glorious and most famous king, the conqueror and tamer, who lived familiarly with Aditi and Casyapa; devote yourselves to him, follow him and obey him to the death; if you are slain while carrying out his orders, you will return to Pantchatouam, — you will return into the elements, without the atoms of which you are composed suffering; and after your soul has been purified in lovely bodies, and is judged worthy of Moucti, it will be absorbed in the Divinity. Now disperse, and be to-day at the place of meeting."

The crowd vanished as if by magic; the Brahmins re-entered the walls through the secret passages, and no one was left in the hall but Daksha, Priyamvada, and Volmerange.

"Would you prefer to spend the remaining portion of the night here," said the old Brahmin to Volmerange, "or set out for the mountain camp?"

"Let us go," cried Volmerange. "This old cave, with its grimacing monsters, is not comfortable. Give me your hand, Priyamvada, for the devil take me if

I can walk without stumbling through these dark passages."

After having groped for some time through the labyrinth of passages, which Priyamvada and the old Brahmin appeared to be well acquainted with, they reached an opening, and it was not without secret satisfaction that Volmerange again breathed the open air. The performance which had just taken place, so full of meaning for the spectators, so ridiculous in his opinion, had wearied him; he found it difficult to look upon himself seriously as a prince of the Lunar dynasty, and but for Priyamvada, his lovely friend with the golden complexion, he would most willingly have given up his throne.

The elephant that had brought the trio was still waiting patiently under guard of its keeper, plucking at the foliage with its trunk and slowly swallowing the leaves, rather by way of filling up the time than because it was hungry. With characteristic intelligence, on hearing the steps of its master, it bent its pillar-like legs and knelt down.

Priyamvada and Daksha climbed to the shoulders of the colossal animal with the ease of people accustomed to that kind of mount. Volmerange was not quite so

skilful, and the young Hindoo girl had to hold out her hand to help him. In his education as a sportsman, which had been very thorough, my hero had not given a thought to this kind of riding.

The keeper, crouching on the skull of the huge animal, drove in his anker, and the elephant started off at a rhythmic trot or amble, the steadiness of which would have worn down the fastest running horse. From time to time it stretched out its trunk, and broke a creeper or branch which was in the way, or if the path was too narrow it leaned against the obstructing tree and broke it down; at other times it trampled over the bamboos, that broke with a snap or bent like grass.

Priyamvada, lying in the howdah placed upon the animal's back, had fallen asleep on Volmerange's breast; as he was much taller than she, she looked like one of those dainty statues of goddesses which the gods hold in their arms: like Parvata on Mahadeva's bosom, Lakshmi on Vishnu's, and Saravasti on Brahma's. Volmerange remained motionless for fear of waking the lovely girl, and gazed upon the strange landscape outspread confusedly before him, and which assumed in the darkness most weird forms: carob

trees, fig trees, banyan trees, babobabs as old as creation, mangroves, and palms mingled their foliage, through which, as on a black spot, suddenly shone a star or a bit of the night sky.

Seated by the keeper, Daksha muttered devoutly a prayer for the success of the enterprise.

After two hours of travel, a reddish light began to gleam between the trunks of the trees, indicating the nearness of the camp where the first mutineers had already collected. The sentries, hearing the noise of the leaves and branches displaced by the elephant bearing the trio, came forward to reconnoitre, and Volmerange, Daksha, and Priyamvada entered the camp.

The sight was most strange, and took one back to the days of the wars between Darius and Alexander. A great fire of brushwood, branches, and broken trees, cast a fantastic light through the leafy vaults of the forest. Around the fire, arranged in a circle, fifty elephants, picturesquely lighted from below, stood motionless, grave, and pensive, like Ganesa, the god of wisdom; scarcely from time to time did their great ears move, and had they not occasionally lifted up their restless trunks as they scented in the distance a prowling tiger or an enemy seeking to enter the wood,

they might have been thought carved out of granite, like their stone brethren that adorn the pagodas. On their backs they bore howdahs, and their tusks were ribbed with iron to prevent their breaking in battle.

Farther off were the Mahrattas and other Hindoos, lying by their horses, and their weapons hanging near them on the trees.

Volmerange and his two friends had not yet descended from their tall mount, when a plaintive cry was heard, immediately succeeded by a tremendous shout. The elephants knelt of themselves to receive their masters; the Mahrattas sprang to their horses; every one ran to his weapons — taking up whatever came first, a musket, a lance, or a bow.

Firing broke out to the right and the left; the terrified outposts were driven back on the main body, and sepoys, supported by red-coated soldiers, were seen running from one tree to another, to take cover and aim in safety. The elephants, driven by their keepers, dashed forward in every direction, breaking down trees, and trampling under foot the enemy they met. The English, for it was they, informed by a traitor of Daksha's plans and the meeting-place of the mutineers, were arriving on all sides and surrounding the camp.

Soon the fight became concentrated upon the space where shone the great fire, and the centre of the mêlée was where stood Volmerange, Daksha, and Priyamvada; by the fierceness with which this point was defended, the assailants understood that there must be the most important personages. Eight or ten Mahrattas, who had climbed on top of Volmerange's elephant, kept up a continual fire; Volmerange himself, helped by Priyamvada, who loaded his musket, shot down an Englishman every time; his valiant steed, taking part in the combat, uttered furious screams, seizing sometimes a man, sometimes a horse in his trunk, and throwing him into the air, or else, bending forward, crushed a whole squad of the enemy against the wall of rock. Bullets rattled on its hide like hail, without other result than making its ears bleed, as if it were tormented by flies. As for Daksha, he held in his hand a sprig of the sacred plant cousa, which he kept rubbing between his fingers, while murmuring the ineffable syllable *om*. The confusion became inexpressible; muskets exploded, arrows hissed, horses neighed, elephants screamed and trumpeted, the wounded groaned, and the smoke, kept in by the leafy vault, formed a heavy pall over the combat.

A group of Englishmen, braver and more resolute than the rest, attempted to scale Volmerange's elephant, but the intelligent animal, backing up against a monstrous babobab, used its trunk like a flail, and struck them down half dead from the horrible blows dealt at their heads; those who escaped the trunk fell under the bullets of Volmerange and the Mahrattas.

The struggle could not last long. Priyamvada, who was loading Volmerange's musket, was struck in the breast; she did not utter a single cry, but the red foam rising to her lips, marked her last kiss on Volmerange's hand, which she took and had just strength to bear to her lips, after having held out to him his second loaded musket. Volmerange fired and killed the Englishman who had shot poor Priyamvada. Three of the five Mahrattas fighting by the side of Volmerange and Daksha had slipped to the ground killed or mortally wounded.

His ammunition expended, Volmerange was now hacking with his sword the heads of the regulars and sepoys who clung to the elephant's ears or climbed upon its tusks to storm the howdah. At last a sepoy, crawling on the ground, got behind the courageous animal, and with a sword as sharp-edged as a Damascus

blade, hamstrung it; the elephant, falling backwards, uttered a terrible scream, broke the sepoy's back with a blow of his tail, tried to rise, and fell upon its side. Priyamvada's body was hurled from the howdah on to the heap of dead, as was also Daksha, who by a miraculous chance had escaped unhurt. Volmerange had let himself slip behind a tree, the branches of which he used to break his fall; a riderless horse passing by, he sprang upon his back and drove his heels into its sides. The horse, which was of the Nedji breed, went off like an arrow.

Daksha, who had never let go his sprig of cousa, said to himself as he resumed his former attitude, —

"The business failed because I was too sensual; I should have put five iron spikes, instead of three, into my back; five is a more mysterious number."

The elephant, which was not dead although it had fallen, sought with its trunk for the body of its young mistress, which it piously replaced on the velvet howdah, after which it expired; for a soldier had driven his bayonet into its brain at the back of the skull.

XVIII

THE small white dot noted by Benedict, that marked with imperceptible silvern fleck the vast green mantle of ocean, was indeed the "Lovely Jenny," keeping its appointment with commendable punctuality; it had already been cruising off and on for three days, within range of the island, at such a distance as not to attract attention, though not so great but that the ship could be made out, through a strong glass, by one who knew of its being near St. Helena.

Twenty times an hour Sir Arthur Sidney would go on deck and look through his telescope towards the black rock; the thin outline of the stunted tree still showed against the heavens.

"It is still there," Sidney would reflect, letting fall the glass with discouragement; but a few minutes later he would again scour the horizon, and still on the summit of the rock the silhouette of the tree showed steadily.

"Well," said Sidney to himself, "I suppose the password could not be exchanged, and my undertaking, prosecuted with so much care and prudence, will fail at the moment of success!"

Carried away with feverish impatience he strode up and down the quarter-deck, climbed the forecastle, and again scanned the isle. Now the crest of the rock showed angular and bare against the bright sky; the tree had vanished!

This simple fact, suddenly answering a world of ideas and projects, moved him so deeply that in spite of his coolness and firmness, he was obliged to lean against the rail; a deadly pallor covered his handsome features: but he soon recovered himself, and went down firmly into his cabin.

There he wrote on a piece of parchment a sort of testament, which he enclosed in a strong glass bottle, which he sealed with a leaden cap; he then enclosed it in the canoe which he had had constructed on the African coast by a ship's carpenter, from the small model I have mentioned.

When night fell he ordered the boat to be launched; Saunders and Jack having each taken an oar, and Sidney the yoke lines, the craft proceeded towards the

island. On reaching a point where it might be perceived, Sidney, Saunders, and Jack entered the low cabin below the deck, for the boat was of very peculiar construction and decked over. Having carefully closed the hatch, Sidney touched a button, and the boat began to sink, until the water closed over it in eddies. Outer fins, worked from within, replaced the oars, and drove the submarine craft, the steersman standing behind plates of glass placed in the bows. A leather tube ending in a floating buoy, which any one would have mistaken for a piece of wreckage driven by the waves, supplied fresh air to the narrow cabin; a compartment which could be filled or emptied at will by means of a pump performed the function of an air-bladder, and enabled the boat to descend or to keep at a given depth.

When Sidney knew by the darker colour of the sea, that they had reached the shadows cast by the high cliffs that surround the island, the boat rose again to the surface, and as it was half submerged, the waves washing over it, it would have been taken, if it had been noticed, for a small whale or a shark travelling close to the surface.

The party thus reached the rock at the foot of which the waves were still tossing the trunk of the

tree cut down by Benedict, carrying it away and throwing it against the rocks with endless play of foam and spray.

Sidney emerged carefully from the hatchway, and landing on a narrow, sandy beach, and clinging to the asperities of the rocks, reached a platform several yards above the level of the highest waves, where he sat down and listened attentively.

For a few moments he heard nothing but the deep breathing of the ocean and the flapping wings of the sea birds, troubled by the presence of man at night in that solitary waste. Presently some pebbles falling from the upper portion of the cliff, rolled, fell down, and shot into the water.

A dark form, clinging to the tufts of brush that grew here and there, and to the cracks in the granite, was descending carefully the almost vertical cliff and approaching Sidney.

Although the meeting had been agreed upon for a long time, Sir Arthur, lest there should have occurred one of those improbable betrayals that always happen in such enterprises, cocked two small pistols in his pockets; the sharp sound caused the dark form to stop in its progress.

"Crabs walk backward, but they reach their destination," said a low, but distinct voice.

"Ah! it is you, Benedict," answered Sir Arthur Sidney in the same way.

"It is I," replied Benedict, sitting down by Sidney's side.

"Well?" said the latter, in a tone full of questioning.

"On seeing the bouquet of violets he spoke the words agreed upon."

"It is well; now we shall act."

"That is not all: that very evening a note, written in cipher, of which you and I alone possess the key, was thrown by an unknown hand into Edith's chamber. The note contained these words: 'Cesar is too ill to risk the enterprise, and postpones it to the first days of next month, to the night of the fourth to the fifth.'"

"Three weeks more to wait!" cried Sir Arthur Sidney. "Does he not know that the air here is deadly, and that Prometheus would need no vulture to pick out his heart? Are you sure of the note? We are so surrounded with traps."

"I have brought it, you can examine it," said Sir Benedict Arundel, holding out to his friend a paper folded into the shape of a square.

"Good-bye, Benedict, in twenty days I shall be back," said Sidney; "I go back to my submarine boat, and will cruise off and on with the 'Lovely Jenny.' In twenty days the stain which Sir Hudson Lowe has made on England's name shall be washed away."

Benedict climbed back to the top of the cliffs; Sidney climbed down to the shore, where the half submerged boat was awaiting him, and on the rock, again deserted, the sea continued to toy with the tree it was tearing to pieces.

On the appointed day the "Lovely Jenny" re-appeared on the horizon, but the heavens were dark and threatening; huge black clouds were spread like funeral draperies; the ocean, stirred to its very depths, rose and moaned, and the wind uttered a chant of desolation, like an invisible chorus; it seemed as if the three thousand Oceanides had come to mourn the Titan. St. Helena, amid the foam that smoked around it as tripods round a catafalque, was even gloomier than usual; on its brow the storm had set a sinister diadem of lightning.

Already signs had been seen in the heavens, as at the death of Julius Cæsar and Jesus Christ; a bloody comet had dragged its tail above the accursed island,

and the clouds, blazing in the furnaces of the West, had assumed the form of great eagles flapping their gigantic wings in the flames; but never had Nature, so impassible, appeared so moved, so terrified, so beside itself as on that night.

The ocean hurled to heaven its bitter tears, the sky wept with its cataclysms, and the gale summed up in its great voice the despairing cry of humanity. Intrepid as he was, Sir Arthur Sidney felt troubled and discouraged in the presence of the formidable sadness of the elements. What was happening, that all Nature thus mourned? What great soul was about to take flight, bearing away with it the wrath of the world? What God, crying on his cross the *lama sabachthani* of the last agony, caused this vast ululation of winds and waves? He dreaded the answer, and as he entered the boat, pale as marble, a cold sweat ran down his temples, his teeth chattered, and yet it was not physical danger that troubled him.

The craft, hermetically closed, sank below the waves or rose on their crests, and advanced, sometimes plunging, sometimes floating, towards the rock where had taken place the last interview between Benedict and Sidney. An open boat would have infallibly been sunk.

It was difficult to avoid being smashed against the granite cliffs, and to land exactly at the little sandy beach. Sidney and his two sailors made the most prodigious efforts. The air was beginning to fail, in spite of the supply coming through the tubes; their lungs were swelling in their breasts, seeking for the vital fluid; their light turned dim, and Jack and Saunders were pulling at the fins less heartily, while Sidney was pumping hard to bring the boat to the surface.

The waves were breaking against the rocky coast with terrific roar and thundering, and smashed heavily against the sides of the boat, which they rolled along their crests.

"Well," said Sidney to himself, "we are lost;" and he looked at his two companions in the dying light of the lamp; on their manly faces the same thought was visible.

"Sir Arthur," said Jack, "it is very unpleasant to be drowned like rats in a trap, but what can't be helped must be endured."

Saunders nodded acquiescence.

Sidney raged at the thought that they were about to perish so wretchedly because of a stupid tempest, at the very moment of accomplishing the plan for which he

had sacrificed everything; there occurred in him one of those mad revolts of mind against brutal force, of the soul against the elements, and he uttered in his heart a blasphemy such as the giants must have uttered when smitten by the thunderbolts.

The lamp went out. Jack and Saunders said:—

"Good-night; lights out!"

The boat struck heavily. Sidney, springing to the hatchway, gave access to a puff of air mingled with sea-water. The keel had caught in the sand, and as a projecting rock broke the seas, the waters were less turbulent here than elsewhere. Sidney managed to jump ashore with the painter and made the boat fast to a huge fallen block of granite. Jack and Saunders followed him, and the three men climbed up to the high platform where Benedict had met his friend on his last visit.

There they were safe from the back-wash; the tempest could only insult them with its foam. They remained for two hours on the rock, drenched, dazzled by the lightning, soaked by the salt spray driven by the winds,—Jack and Saunders, with the devoted impassibility of dogs awaiting their masters' orders; Sir Arthur Sidney, nervous, trembling, almost hysterical; every

minute seeming an age; biting his lips, tearing his breast with his nails, as he tried to be patient.

The night wore on, the gale gradually passed away, the weary sea was running less heavily.

"What can be the matter?" murmured Sidney; "it will soon be day."

Indeed the dawn now shone pale along the lower sky, and then the bloody sun showed above the heavy sea, still disturbed by the night gale, its orb cut by the undulating line of the horizon. In the distance the "Lovely Jenny" was rising and falling upon the waves.

Day had come, but not the Emperor!

XIX

WHY does not Benedict send me word? What can have happened? What unexpected obstacle has caused our well-planned scheme to fail?" asked Sir Arthur of himself, as he strode up and down the narrow platform, to warm his limbs chilled by the coolness of the night. "To live so long, with but one thought, one hope; to devote one's self to it absolutely, with the most complete self-abnegation; to give up for it love, family, and friendship; to sacrifice to it every human feeling and one's own genius; to put at its service a mighty and inflexible will and forces that could overturn the world, — then, at the very moment of fulfilment, to be stopped by some idiotic obstacle: yesterday, by an absurd tempest; this morning, by some foolish incident I cannot imagine, — a key, perhaps, that would not turn in a lock; a soldier who had been bribed and who feels scruples after he has the money, and wants to be paid twice over; even less than that, it may be, for no one can foresee the innumerable, stupid resistances of thoughts to ideas, and of matter to mind."

While these thoughts passed through his mind, Sidney was gesticulating wildly; he suddenly stopped, crossed his arms on his breast, and remained for a few moments sunk in deep thought.

"Suppose chance has a will, too? Oh!" he went on after a pause, "in that case *my* will shall break the other down."

While Sidney was indulging in these thoughts, Jack and Saunders, very much less inclined to meditation, were chewing their quid, passing it now into the right and now into the left cheek, and gazing at the sea with the attentive though apparently careless glance of the sailor, who cannot help watching, even when he is safe on land, the element on which his life depends.

The gale had fallen, and the boat's stern, the bows caught in the sand and held by the painter, rose and fell softly upon the lessening heave.

"Come, Saunders, climb that rock, and stand sentry up there. As for you Jack, get into the boat and pump out any water that may have found its way into the cabin."

The two sailors started to carry out Sidney's orders, — the one climbed up, the other climbed down.

At first glance, the notion of a man ascending to the top of the cliffs seemed absurd; but on closer examination the rock proved less vertical than it appeared; it sloped here and there, and resting-places seemed to have been provided by Nature's industrious hands; at the least accessible spots shrubs, brambles, or plants offered a hold to the climber. Saunders therefore quickly got to the top, but the country was deserted, and he signed to Sidney that he could make out nothing.

Jack soon pumped the boat dry, for in spite of the heavy tossing of the night before, it had not been damaged; so if only the Emperor came nothing was yet lost.

But the day passed without any one appearing.

It is impossible to express Sidney's sufferings during those long hours of waiting. Towards midday he said to himself: —

"Yes, it will come off to-night. No doubt yesterday's gale made them think I would not put in; the wind was so strong and the sea so heavy. That must have been the reason — I was a fool not to have thought of it at first; for indeed no one but a madman like myself would venture out in such weather."

This notion buoyed him up until evening, and he even grew calm enough to eat some biscuit and drink some rum, which Jack brought from the boat.

Saunders had seen nothing from his observatory. The "Lovely Jenny," troubled at not seeing the boat return, had drawn closer to the island than prudence dictated, and was tacking off and on and signalling.

"Although I am a prey to the deepest anxiety," thought Sidney, "Benedict was right not to come and inform me of the cause of the delay; his going and coming might have excited suspicion; they keep so strict watch on this accursed island that the least imprudence might have been fatal on this supreme occasion."

Thus did Sidney pass the day, in alternations of hope and despair, and in such lively anxiety that the hair on his temples turned white. Evening came on, and the sun sank gradually on the other side of the sea, after having plunged through several banks of clouds, as a shell bursts through the floors of a building; the bloody reflection was prolonged over the luminous waves, then died out, and night fell with the rapidity peculiar to tropical regions.

The hours of darkness seemed to Sidney longer than endless eternities, and I cannot attempt to depict the

night he spent; expectation, uneasiness, rage, despair, and the wildest suppositions, struggled in the mind of the unfortunate man until dawn returned.

A thought suddenly struck Sidney, and chilled him as if a steel blade had been driven into his heart: Could the emperor have mistrusted him?

"Of course; I am an Englishman," he went on with a bitter laugh that was almost maniacal. "Or can he be worse?"

Utterly careless of safety, at the repeated risk of falling into the sea, using his hands and feet, clinging to the projections and shrubs, driving his nails into the smooth wall, — he reached in a few moments the top of the cliffs, and started to run in the direction of Longwood.

The environs of the residence presented an unwonted aspect; the gale of the night before had uprooted all the trees, which lay with soiled leaves, their roots in the air; a feeling of sombreness, solemnity, and irreparable misfortune weighed down upon the humble dwelling, in and around which there were evidences of discreet activity and silent agitation. The sentinels, leaning on their muskets, no longer challenged, and seemed to have relaxed their watchfulness; remaining motionless in their places they carelessly fulfilled a useless duty, rather

through obedience to military orders than through necessity. The officers who passed did not reproach them with their negligence. The residents of the island went and came without being stopped, and Sidney crossed the line of guards without any one paying attention to him.

He approached Longwood; men and women, suspending their steps, spoke in a low voice, with an air of constraint, entered the house and came out in a few minutes paler than before, their eyes red.

Sir Arthur Sidney, his heart filled with a dreadful presentiment, his limbs giving way under him, leaning against the wall, stumbling, intoxicated by grief, followed the crowd without quite knowing what he was doing.

But he had not gone many steps before a sorrowful spectacle of majesty presented itself to his eye. Lying in his war mantle, rather like a soldier resting before the next day's victory than like a body which life has left, Napoleon, stretched upon his state bed, wearing the uniform of the Light Infantry of the Guard, his breast covered with orders and brilliant stars, his trusty sword by his side like a faithful friend,—was dreaming his first dream of eternity. A strange expression of serenity and deliverance illumined his pale, marble-like face, which the convulsions of agony had respected; every-

thing which the intoxication of triumph, the pain of reverses, the fatiguing thoughts of suffering can leave in the way of material traces upon the human face, had vanished. It was no longer the body of a man, but the statue of a god; death allowed the celestial portion to show through the terrestrial; the dungeon was transformed into a tomb, the funeral chamber into an Olympus. Neither Christ on his cross nor Prometheus on his rock had a nobler or handsomer face.

Oh! great, imperial soul, what did you behold during your first hours of immortality? Who dared to meet you, to lead you to God? Alexander, Charlemagne, Julius Cæsar, your well-beloved Lannes, who called upon you alone as he died, — or your dear Duroc? Or was it some poor grenadier of your Old Guard, who thought his blood well shed when he found that you remembered his name?

At the sight of dead Napoleon, Sidney turned faint; the pinions of vertigo flapped noisily within his brain; he staggered forward, and falling upon his knees by the bedside, kissed the icy hand that had held the sceptre of the world. He was not interfered with, for kisses bring no one back to life; only, as he remained some-

what too long sunk in his grief, he was urged with a musket-butt to give way to others.

He went out, wan, broken down, scarcely able to drag himself, — more like a phantom than a man, having aged a score of years in one minute; his haggard, lack-lustre eyes wandering around or sometimes resting upon some insignificant object with puerile obstinacy. He was amazed to find himself alive now that the Emperor was dead; he wondered that the sun still shone, that the mountains had not changed their shapes, that Nature went on with its work. As for himself, he was weak, as after a long illness; the light dazzled him; the air was too strong for him; his faculties, so long kept on a stretch, suddenly failed him; his firm, powerful will had lost its bearings and went around like a crazy needle; a tremendous crash had occurred in him.

His body, moved by a distant remembrance, took him to Edith's country-house; he pushed the garden gate, entered the parlour, and sank on a chair without a word. Edith, whose pallor was made the greater by the black dress she wore, advanced silently towards him and took his hand. This mark of sympathy caused Sidney's tears, which sought to flow, to rush

forth impetuously through the hand with which he had covered his eyes.

At this moment Benedict entered, and explained to Sidney why he had failed to be at the meeting-place: he had been questioned and detained, his movements having excited suspicion; the Emperor's death and lack of proof had caused him to be at once released. But Sidney did not listen, for explanations had no meaning for him henceforth.

He remained a few days longer on the island, seeking to satisfy his grief to the utmost; he followed the funeral procession into the Valley of Fermain, into which falls from Diana's Peak the brook the Emperor loved, and where weep the willows whose sacred leaves have since been scattered over the universe. He watched the English soldiers bear away the coffin on their shoulders; saw it lowered into the stone tomb, and withdrew only when the black opening was closed by the long and narrow stone. He wanted, by taking in carefully all these details of the funeral, to persuade himself that his misfortune was real; he feared lest later he should believe that the Emperor was not dead; he already felt that illusion arising in his mind, although he had beheld Napoleon dead on his state bed, and had

touched his icy cold hand; he meant to have a recollection of the funeral and tomb to oppose to his own fancies.

As he climbed the hill towards Hutsgate, he turned around a last time, to look at the new white stone under the soft shade of the willows, and said: —

"My soul is buried with that body."

At that moment a man dressed in mourning, and speaking English with a French accent, held out a paper to Sidney, and said: —

"Take this from him who is gone."

Sidney opened the envelope, sealed with black wax; it contained a small lock of fine silk hair, and a note on which were written these words: —

"Console yourself, no one can prevail against God.

"N."

When Sidney looked up the man who had handed him the paper had vanished.

So he sat down on the slope of the hill, and sank into a deep reverie. When he arose his features had become more calm; a change had come over him; he returned to Benedict's house, and said to him: —

"Forgive me for having turned you away from hap-

piness, in order to make you a partner in my mad attempt. I free you from your oath."

And he drew from his pocket-book the yellowed paper, which he tore and cast at Benedict's feet.

"Return to Europe; you are free; nothing now binds you longer to our mysterious association; follow the inclination of your heart, be happy; do not seek to alter the book of Fate, — other hands than ours hold the threads of events, and perhaps what seems to us unjust is supreme equity. As for me, the car of my life has been thrown out of its rut, and cannot get back into it; I was fit for one thing only; that thing has failed; it is all over; and whether I am buried to-day, the day after to-morrow, or later, is no matter — I am dead. Thought, feeling, and will have fled and vanished. And you, my dear Edith, do you try to find some reason for living — it may be you have already done so."

As he said this, Sir Arthur Sidney looked steadily at Edith, who could not help blushing.

"Love some one, a man, a child, a dog, a flower, but never an idea, — that is dangerous."

Having spoken these words, Sidney shook hands with his friends, and returned to the black rock where

Saunders and Jack, who had used up their tobacco, were beginning to feel very weary.

Arundel and Miss Edith, left alone on the island, did not hasten their departure as might at first have been thought they would do, although St. Helena is a pretty lonely place. Edith, thrown into the sea by her husband, was in no hurry to return to Europe; Benedict, although he claimed and believed himself to be still deeply in love with Annabel, was in no wise weary of life in the cottage, which a city merchant would have declared uncomfortable, but which was illumined by Edith's presence. The young woman on her part, was astonished to find she thought so little of Volmerange; and the pair of them made incredible efforts to retain within their hearts the love which was escaping.

Already Benedict could not find in his memory the lovely features of his beauteous bride; Edith's always mingled with them; sometimes a sweet, veiled glance, sometimes a tender and melancholy smile; the two faces melted one into the other. Edith was in precisely the same position; when in her thoughts she called up Volmerange, it was very often Benedict who appeared, — indeed after some time, Volmerange did

not come, and Edith began to think that a man who drowned his wife so summarily was not, perhaps, an ideal husband.

Naturally the two young people insisted on anticipating uncommon happiness on their return to London, when Benedict might at last marry Annabel, and Edith, sufficiently punished, would be reconciled to her terrible husband.

Usually these conversations began gaily, but they generally ended in a somewhat melancholy mood. Benedict did not like the idea of Edith returning to Volmerange, and Edith was not greatly delighted at the thought of the happiness which awaited her friend with Miss Vyvyan. Such were the thoughts which filled the minds of the young couple in St. Helena, while a few yards from the house the weeping willow drooped its leaves over the greatest tomb in the world, — if there be any difference between tombs.

Their own tender feelings occupied them much more than the effect of Napoleon's death upon the destinies of the world; even when at night they went to Fermain Valley to contemplate the Titan's tomb, to listen to the brook murmuring past the corner of the funeral stone, and to watch the wind whirl away the

pale leaves of the melancholy tree, — they were thinking of themselves.

A curl of hair falling upon Edith's neck, brought out with its rich brown colour the pale rosy cheek, and drew Benedict away from the great thoughts which the tomb of the most illustrious of captains ought to have inspired, while his admiring glance promptly dried in Edith's lovely eyes the tears that sprang to them at the remembrance of the great captive.

They at first thought of writing to Europe, to inform their friends of their return, but they thought better of it and agreed it was wiser to come unexpectedly into the midst of the general grief; it would be a pleasant philosophical experiment. They would be able to judge for themselves of the depth and the sincerity of the regrets they had excited; they would see for themselves whether the places they had left empty had been filled, and whether faith had been kept in Europe as in Africa. Annabel must certainly be in tears, Volmerange devoured by remorse. But suppose it should not be so? Suppose Miss Vyvyan, indignant at Benedict's inexplicable disappearance, had taken back her heart? Suppose Volmerange did not feel the least regret at

having thrown his wife into the Thames? — what would they do in that case? Our two innocent hypocrites dared not confess, even to themselves, that they would be delighted if that were the case, and that the proper thing under those circumstances would be to go on loving each other, as they had been doing secretly for the last two months.

They allowed one or two vessels proceeding from Calcutta to London to pass by, and at last made up their minds to board the third, — a swift sailing-vessel, built of teak, copper-fastened and copper-bottomed, — which took them in six weeks to Cadiz, whence they continued their trip by land, visiting Andalusia, Seville, Granada, Cordova, — still under the convenient appellation of Mr. and Mrs. Smith. Everybody thought they were married; some gossip-mongers saying they were two young lovers enjoying their honeymoon. Their pillows alone knew the truth; they were madly in love, but the angel of modesty might have been present at every moment of their life. Only they did not hasten back, and what with visiting mosques and cathedrals, Alcazars, palaces, going to *tertulias* and bull-fights, — it took them some four months to traverse Spain; so that they reached Paris just in time for the

winter season. Finally, when they had no longer any decent pretext to delay, as they were exceedingly conscientious, they remarked to each other one evening: —

"Is it not time to go back to London, and to see whether we are loved and forgiven, or replaced and cursed?"

The thought of meeting again those whom they pretended they loved best in the world, made them so sad that they felt ready to burst into tears, and to fall into each other's arms, never again to separate. But the situation was becoming embarrassing: Sir Benedict Arundel could not go on calling himself Mr. Smith, nor Lady Edith Harley, Countess of Volmerange, Mrs. Smith, which is a very prosaic and commonplace name. So the next morning they called for post horses for Calais, and a few hours later were awaiting the departure of the steamer.

XX

THE horse caught by Volmerange was a thorough-bred, swift as the wind; in a few minutes it carried its rider beyond the centre of the battle, or rather of the massacre, for it was now only a confused battling of elephants, horses, and men. The rout was complete.

For some time Volmerange heard the elephants trumpeting in the distance, and saw on the ground, red with the reflection of the burning wood, the shadow of his horse, galloping before him like a strange, monstrous form he was pursuing; the horse itself, maddened by the deformed shape, sprang furiously forward, and bent down to bite at it.

Little by little the fleeing men who, during the first part of Volmerange's mad rush, had been galloping by his side, were left behind; the screams of the elephants had ceased to be heard, and the night had resumed its blue tint. Volmerange still galloped at top speed along the banks of the Godavari, his horse with marvellous

instinct avoiding the pitfalls, jumping fallen trees, and swerving from quagmires without ever diminishing its speed in the least.

When Volmerange had ridden some twenty-five or thirty miles from the battle-field, he pulled in his horse, and guided by a light which twinkled on the river bank, reached the hut of a fisherman, busy mending his net, who prostrated himself before him after having helped him to dismount.

The Count sat down against the wall of the hut on a bench covered with saptaparna, and speaking to the fisherman in Hindoostanee asked him if he could procure for him other clothes, and a boat in which he might descend the river.

"I can do so," answered the fisherman, who had recognized his rank by his insignia, "but your lordship may not care to put on the humble dress of a poor Hindoo of the lowest class, a wretched soudra, who is not worthy of pressing with his brow the dust on your lordship's road."

"The meaner the dress, the more suitable it will be," said Volmerange, entering the hut.

Helped by the fisherman, he threw off his warrior's dress and put on the humble garments, under which it

would have been difficult to recognize the leader of the insurrection. The fisherman, for greater safety, advised him to stain his face and hands with the juice of the colocynth, as his comparatively fair complexion might betray him.

Having taken these precautions, the fisherman cast loose his boat, and the horse, that had come down to the river bank, seeing that its services were no longer needed, dashed off, after noisily breathing in the air, towards the hill, where, no doubt, lay his pasturage.

I shall not follow Volmerange day by day during the course of his river trip, which was long. Let it suffice that he gained the coast in safety, and after rewarding the fisherman with one of the precious stones that adorned the hilt of his sabre, he boarded a French vessel sailing up the gulf of Bengal, which had stopped at the river mouth to fill up with fresh water.

As he was returning alone, or at least accompanied but by the remembrance of two dead women, — Edith whom he had drowned, and Priyamvada shot by his side, — he did not, although the distance was great, take nearly as much time to return to Europe as did Edith and Sir Benedict Arundel.

In spite of himself a secret attraction dragged him back to London, which he had so many reasons to avoid; it may be he obeyed that singular magnetism which men feel just as much as animals, and which induces them to return to the same place after every violent blow of Fate which has compelled them to leave it; like bulls, that always return to the *querencia* until they die.

Although, owing to the rush of events, the Count had not had time to mourn Priyamvada's unhappy fate, as it deserved, it had, nevertheless, produced a deep impression upon him; he felt himself circumvented by some dark fatality, and he resolved to dwell alone for fear of bringing evil upon those he might love; so he lived in isolation, going out at night only, and then to deserted places, — not that there was any reason why he should hide, for before leaving for India he had sent Edith's letters to Lord and Lady Harley, with these words at the foot: "Justice has been done." The family had spread the report that the girl, taken to Italy by the Count, to enjoy the honeymoon, had died at Naples of a fever caught in the Pontine marshes. As this was in no wise unlikely, society, which does not busy itself much about those that have dropped out, was

satisfied with the specious statement, — Lord and Lady Harley's grief confirming it.

One evening the Count de Volmerange was walking in the quietest part of Hyde Park. A young lady, whose elegant and rich dress marked her as belonging to the highest aristocracy, was walking swiftly, accompanied at some distance by a servant in livery, along the pond which lies in the solitary portion of the park which is frequented usually only by lovers, poets, and dreamers; sometimes also by pickpockets, for a man of evil appearance, issuing suddenly from the shrubbery, sprang towards the lady, and seizing her shawl, which was fastened by a large jewelled pin, endeavoured to drag away the rich tissue. The servant ran up, but a blow, delivered in accordance with the best rules of boxing, and which struck him square in the face, sent him to the ground, a couple of yards away, his nose and mouth bleeding.

The thief still pulled at the shawl, and the young woman, almost strangled, could scarcely call for help. Volmerange, happening to reach a turn of the walk, saw the struggle, and reaching the group at one bound, re-established the balance of affairs by a blow of his stick, which slashed the thief's face like a sabre cut, and

made him flee howling with pain in spite of his very natural desire to hold his tongue.

The lady was so terrified she could scarcely stand, and Volmerange was obliged to give up pursuing the thief, in order to support her. When she had somewhat recovered, Volmerange was about to withdraw after having gravely bowed to her, but the lady held out her hand, stopped him, and said in a timid and beseeching voice: —

"Oh! sir, be chivalrous a little longer; kindly take me back to my carriage; my poor Daniel is in a piteous condition, and I am afraid that if these evil-doers see me alone again, they may attack me once more."

It was scarcely possible to refuse such a request, and although Volmerange had sworn to himself never to trouble again with any woman, he could not help offering, graciously enough for a misanthrope who intended to surpass the savageness of Timon of Athens, the protection which was asked with an insistence that terror rendered almost caressing.

The carriage was waiting at a somewhat distant point, so that on the way these two persons, so unexpectedly brought together, were enabled to become somewhat acquainted with each other. And, indeed,

a woman with whom you have gone a couple of hundred yards, holding on to your arm, and still agitated by deep emotion, pressing you with her hand because her feet are trembling, ceases to be a stranger. So Volmerange, who had time to notice the beauty of the lady, and to gather from the few remarks they exchanged on the way that she was clever, involuntarily slackened his steps, when he saw, drawn up near one of the park gates, a carriage with its shining panels and its splendid coat of arms.

"I hope you will not refuse," she said after having seated herself in the satin-lined carriage, and before the footman closed the door, "to tell me the name of my deliverer. I am Miss Annabel Vyvyan."

"I am Count de Volmerange," he replied, with a deep bow.

Miss Annabel Vyvyan, for it was she, walked, after the fashion of young English women, every day in that part of the park, and though her adventure might well have caused her to abandon her pedestrian excursions, she returned the next day at the accustomed hour. Perhaps she had a vague presentiment that in case of accident her protector would not fail to be there, for she went down the same walk as the day

before, and skirted the Serpentine as she usually did; although she did not quite say so to herself, she desired to delicately reward Volmerange's courage, the recompense being the opportunity to meet her a second time.

Possibly Volmerange, for his part, fancied Miss Annabel Vyvyan was not quite safe in that part of the park, in spite of the footman who followed her, for the next day he took his walk precisely at the same place and at the same hour.

Neither of them appeared astonished at meeting, and they chatted for some little time,—longer perhaps than strict conventionality allowed; and Volmerange, for fear of an unpleasant occurrence, escorted Miss Annabel back to her carriage.

Not long afterwards the Count was regularly presented to Lady Eleanor Braybrooke, who thought him charming, and noted with pleasure that he paid long and frequent visits; for the practical lady considered that Miss Annabel carried too far her faithfulness to her imaginary widowhood.

What I have now to relate violates the poetics of novels, which admit of but a single, eternal love; this, however, is not a novel. Miss Annabel Vyvyan, who had scarcely believed that after the disappearance or

death of Benedict, she could ever love again, was quite surprised to feel her heart — which she believed extinguished forever under the ashes of her first disappointment — beating again: the name of Count Volmerange, when he was announced by the footman, always brought a faint colour to Miss Annabel's pale cheeks; at night, when after two or three hours' delightful conversation with Volmerange, she laid her head upon her lace-trimmed pillow, and submitted to that little self-examination which every pretty woman indulges in about the flirtations of the day, — she would acknowledge that she had replied with too indulgent a glance to a burning look, discussed too long points of amorous metaphysics, and had not withdrawn her hand quickly enough when bidding good-night. When she had gone to sleep, her dreams were filled with the face of Volmerange rather than that of Benedict.

The two couples that had met at the door of St. Margaret's church, had physically and morally crossed over, and, by a curious symmetry, just as Benedict now loved Edith, so did Miss Annabel love Volmerange, who returned her love. Chance in these contradictory combinations seemed to enjoy crossing human purposes; neither of the projected unions had been

accomplished, none of the pledges given had been kept; those of the four who were apparently well matched, had on the contrary, fallen in love with the others. A mysterious power had substituted for the rational plan of these lives, a fantastic scenario, extravagant, illogical; the unity of place and action had been violated by the great Romanticist who arranges human dramas, and is called the Unexpected.

Lady Braybrooke, who greatly desired to see Annabel married, after what she called Benedict's affront, never ceased to praise Volmerange to her; her praise was naturally accompanied by reprobation of the former bridegroom. Nothing definite had yet been spoken, but their hearts understood each other; Volmerange was a declared lover, and gave his arm to Lady Eleanor Braybrooke, and when the aunt and niece went to the theatre he always had a seat at the back of the box, behind Miss Annabel. It must be confessed that the finest settings and most pathetic scenes scarcely caused him to look up, for his glance rested by preference upon the sweeping lines of Miss Annabel's neck and lovely shoulders. And so it was that, though he frequented the theatre, no one was less acquainted with the repertoire; and Lady Eleanor Braybrooke was

somewhat surprised at so intelligent a gentleman profiting so little by the fine things which he seemed to listen to so attentively.

Annabel did indeed, from time to time, feel a vague dread of the sudden appearance of Benedict, who would reproach her with her disloyalty: for no woman will admit that a man can be faithless, though she herself never lacks excellent reasons to justify a similar fault on her own part; but the months passed, and Benedict's disappearance was still enveloped in the deepest obscurity; Miss Vyvyan had therefore gradually overcome her dread of any posthumous claim, and was beginning to love Volmerange without feeling too much terrified at the possible consequences; while the latter had totally forgotten Edith and even Priyamvada.

His adventures with the latter only occurred to him as the hallucinations of an opium dream, — her golden complexion, her painted eyes, her exotic perfumes, their excursions on elephants' backs, their meetings in the pagodas, the battles in the forest filled with creepers, — all these strange scenes recurred to the Count as unreal remembrances. Had Priyamvada lived, charming though she was, she would certainly have proved an embarrassment to Volmerange, for what would have

been said, had he taken her to Almack's, of a lady who wore ear-rings in her nose, and whose brow was tattooed with gorothchana? Yet the Count could not help a feeling of sadness, as he recalled the perfect beauty, the ardent love, and the boundless devotion of the poor Hindoo maid. These qualities, although somewhat uncommon and irregular, did deserve some regrets.

During all these chances and changes, Miss Edith and Sir Benedict Arundel, whom we left on the Calais pier, had taken ship and reached England.

Before entering London, they had separated, and each had taken a house in a retired section. Naturally the fiction of the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Smith could no longer be kept up; besides, Miss Edith was Countess of Volmerange, and Sir Benedict the husband of Miss Annabel Vyvyan, or nearly so. They had returned from St. Helena, with the intention of resuming wedded life; then they had also to carry out the philosophical test they had agreed upon.

Volmerange had received a note from Annabel, inviting him to call for her with her aunt, and to go to a concert at Princess ——'s. He was dressed and ready to go when his valet informed him that a veiled lady desired to speak to him.

"A veiled lady? that is a curious visit at such an hour as this! It is a long time since I have given up frequenting the wings of Drury Lane, and this is not the operatic season. Who the devil can it be? I suppose some high-principled mother, who wants me to engage her daughter as companion."

"What shall I tell the lady, sir?" asked the valet, who evidently waited for an answer.

"Tell her to write her name, and what she wants, on her card."

"I did so, sir," answered the valet, "but she replied she did not wish to give her name, and would speak to you alone."

"Is she young or old, ugly or pretty?" asked the Count, through an excess of precaution.

"As far as I can judge of the appearance of the veiled lady, sir, she is pretty, and by the lightness of her walk I should judge she is young."

The Count looked at the clock, and saw he had a half-hour to spare before calling on Annabel; he told his servant to show in the mysterious person.

The curious visit, the determination not to give her name, the veil drawn over the features, combined to give a romantic turn to the adventure, which easily

captivated the lively imagination of the Count; and yet, in spite of himself, he felt a vague terror, and shuddered involuntarily. He happened to catch sight of himself in the mirror, and saw that he was pale.

The room was large, richly but quietly furnished, and lighted by a single lamp, the beams of which, concentrated in a single point, left the rest of the room in shadow. It was raining, and the rain beat on the windows in a way that recalled a certain tempestuous night.

An anxious expectation, contrasting with the trifling nature of his replies to his servant, filled Volmerange's heart. When the door opened to give passage to the stranger, the slight creaking of the hinges caused him to start nervously.

The door was in shadow, so the Count could not at first make out the lady who had entered, but with the well-bred courtesy which marked him, he advanced towards her. The light of the lamp now fell full upon the new-comer; the valet was right — it was not ugliness, but a secret or modesty, which induced the use of the veil, through which the beauty of the lady shone like a fire behind a metallic grating. She could not be seen, but one felt she was beautiful. She wore a long white

gown, which fell in fine close folds like those of Phidias, and over it fell, with coquettish but funereal lines, a black lace mantilla.

"Madam," said Volmerange, "will you not draw up your veil? Since you can trust me so far as to call at my house at this hour, these precautions are useless: your secret is safe. You will not let me know your name, let me at least see your face."

"Do you wish it?" replied the unknown, in a sweet, penetrating voice.

The well-known accents made Volmerange shiver.

The lady, with a slender white hand, the shape of which recalled innumerable remembrances to the Count, began slowly to draw up the black folds of her veil; first showed her lovely chin, marked with a little mark that filled Volmerange with dread; then lips of the brightest red, which carried his terror to the highest point; then the Greek nose and the lovely brown eyes that made him mad with fright.

Holding her veil above her head with her beautiful marble hand, in an attitude worthy of an antique statue, she placidly presented herself to Volmerange's startled gaze. He had drawn back and trembled like a leaf.

"Oh!" he uttered in a low voice, "who are you?"

"I am Lady Edith, Countess of Volmerange."

"No, you lie! you are a spectre; your dress must be wet; you have come from the Thames. Go, leave me! I drowned you; you know it, I had the right to do it. What a strange adventure! Is Dolfos going to come back to life too? It would be very funny," said the Count, bursting into shrill laughter.

He was a maniac.

XXI

MISS ANNABEL, in her ball-dress, was studying in the mirror the effect of a sprig of Cape heath, coquettishly placed in her beautiful hair; she had never looked lovelier; the thought of the coming of the man she loved lighted her beauty with an inward glory that made her radiant. It is sweet at such a time to feel one's self beautiful, and to increase love by admiration. Fair, rosy, dazzling, in a dress that seemed cut out of the petals of a flower, in a gauze tunic more tenuous and transparent than the wings of a dragon-flower and caught up by sprigs of heath like that she wore in her hair, Annabel Vyvyan looked like a sylph indulging in the fancy of going out for the evening.

The maid, having done her work, withdrew. Annabel, left alone, — for Lady Eleanor Braybrooke, having much more to do in the way of repairing her beauty, remained much longer than her niece in the hands of her women, — felt that sort of restlessness which people who have dressed too early for an entertain-

ment are apt to experience. She had written Volmerange to come at nine; it was scarcely eight, so she had an hour of idleness and motionlessness to spend; for she might have disarranged her dress had she indulged in any occupation.

By way of passing the time she took up a book and read inattentively a few pages; she opened the piano and ran her polished fingers up and down the bright ivory keys, but the sound of the notes and the vibration of the strings made her nervous, so she closed the instrument. One of her bracelets, somewhat too large, slipped down on her hand, and was in her way; she went to her jewel-case to take out another; as she replaced the jewel-case, her eyes fell upon the letters Benedict had written in the days of his courtship. It so happened that this was the very anniversary of the wedding so strangely interrupted at St. Margaret's.

This fact, recalled to Miss Annabel's memory by the sight of the casket, made her sigh; moved by a melancholy fancy she drew one letter from the bundle, and standing by the mantel-piece, for she felt chilly in her low-necked dress, she began to read.

"Dear Annabel," said the letter, which had been written during a short absence, "how am I to spend

the three days which I have to pass far from you, after having become accustomed to your sweet presence, and seeing every evening your soul shining in your eyes, and your mind in your smile? The only thing which enables me to bear with the separation is the thought that soon we shall never again be parted, and that our two lives shall flow on like two streams that mingle their waters."

The reading of the note plunged Miss Annabel into a deep reverie.

"What is the use," she said to herself, "of keeping these tokens of a false love?"

And she cast the letter into the fire.

She took a second, which she read, and which joined the first in the burning coals. She thus traversed, letter by letter, the whole course of her vanished love. As soon as she had breathed the vague perfume of remembrance that clung to the notes, she threw into the flames the remains of a vanished time of happiness.

"Nine o'clock," she said as she threw away the last letter in the casket, "and Volmerange has not come."

The paper caught fire, and owing to the coals burning away, rolled on the floor in front of the fireplace;

just as it was about to go out, but revived no doubt by some draft, the letter, more than half consumed, blazed up, and the dying flame, seeking for food, touched the hem of Annabel's gauze dress, and flashed like a serpent up the folds of the light stuff. Annabel saw herself suddenly in the midst of a flaming light and a hot atmosphere; she ran to the bell-rope, but maddened by terror and pain she looked for it on the left when it was on the right, and the flames, excited by her movements, enveloped her victoriously and triumphantly. The poor child rolled on the floor to try to put out the fire, and tried to drag off her clothes as she screamed.

At that very moment the door was opened and the servant announced: —

"Sir Benedict Arundel."

"Save me, save me!" cried unfortunate Annabel, enveloped in flames.

Benedict and the servant sprang forward, but it was too late; and in the delirium of horrible agony she fixed her terrified eyes on her former lover, and murmured as the death rattle was heard: —

"Benedict here! Oh! this is too great a punishment!"

The servant, terrified, half beside himself, sprang out for a doctor and water, while Benedict endeavoured to stifle the flames that still burned Annabel's undergarments by wrapping her up in the table-cover; but when assistance came Annabel had just expired.

Benedict, half crazed, went away, unable to bear the dreadful sight; no one, in the excitement of the terrible catastrophe, paid any attention to his coming or going. — A few days later, Lady Eleanor Braybrooke received a few half-burned letters that had been picked up on the floor, and that explained the dreadful event; through her tears she managed to make out the few incomplete lines that remained, and understood that these bits of paper had caused the accident, — a discovery which further increased the hatred the good lady entertained for Benedict.

By a strange coincidence, by a mysterious fatality, Benedict's love-letters had taken back Annabel at the very moment when she expected a different visitor; a superstitious soul might have seen a chastisement in this, — but a chastisement of what? Innocence, no doubt, unless innocence pays the ransom of crime by a law of inversion, the reason for which escapes me.

The visits paid by Benedict and Miss Edith had not resulted very fortunately, and their experiment had ended as most philosophical experiments do end.

On arriving at the close of this story, or episode rather, I feel the need of clearing up the parts of the narration which would otherwise remain obscure.

During the latter years of the Empire, friendships contracted at college, acquaintances made in society or elsewhere, similarity of tastes in work or pleasure, a certain bold conformity of thought, and the curious chances of fortune had drawn together in England men of different countries and different ranks, but every one of great mind, and strong will, — men of mark in their own way. A sort of involuntary free-masonry had speedily arisen among them; they spoke to each other in society, and exchanged in the recesses of windows rapid remarks that summed up a whole philosophy in an imperceptible smile or a slight shrug of the shoulders. Many were rich, others were powerful, some were both; others skilful, some great poets, others great politicians.

The ordinary amusements of a club — wine, horses, and women — could not satisfy such people, who were

weary of the emotions of orgies and gambling; several of them, besides, could have exhibited a longer and better selected list of names than that of Don Juan. They therefore sought for an aim to which they could devote their activity, and this is what they found: the triumph of Will over Fate.

Constituting themselves into a sort of secret tribunal, they summoned before them contemporary history, and gave themselves the task of annulling its decrees when they did not consider them just. In a word, they proposed to work events over, and to correct Providence. These intrepid gamblers, bolder than the Titans of fable, tried to win back from God the games lost on the green cloth of the world, and bound themselves by most formidable oaths to assist each other in these undertakings.

The insurrection in India, the re-establishment of Napoleon on a greater throne, the deliverance of Spain, the freeing of Greece, where later Byron, who was one of the members of the Junta, came to his death,—such were the plans which these men proposed to carry out. The various movements and revolts which took place about that time were their work. They it was who guided the Mahrattas against England, who

agitated in the Peninsula, prepared the Greek insurrection, and tried to carry off the Emperor, for whom the Oriental empire he had dreamed of in his youth had been made ready in India, whence he was to return to Europe by retracing Alexander's road.

These great minds, these inflexible wills, which made over the map of the world, and determined to make Chance obey their orders, had never yet succeeded in their purpose; whenever they had nearly attained their end, they had been overthrown by that small, soft air, which is perhaps the spirit of God; all their carefully worked-out plans had failed, and, though they could not tell why, in spite of all their efforts, mysterious Fate continued on its blind way, maintaining its decisions. What appeared to them the right was beaten; what appeared to them injustice was triumphant. Genius was crucified, and mediocrity bloomed out under its golden crown. An unexpected obstacle, a treason, or some other obstacle, invariably upset their arrangements at the very moment of success. They tried to stem events, and felt themselves, in spite of their prodigious efforts, carried away by the resistless tide.

Most of them stuck to their task with the fury of a

gambler in ill-luck, the delirium of pride struggling with the impossible; madmen that they were, they cast handfuls of dust against Heaven, and like Xerxes, would willingly have had the sea beaten with rods. Others, stronger-minded, had begun to suspect what, for lack of a better expression, I shall call "the mathematics of Chance;" they began to feel that events were determined by a gravitation, the law of which had yet to be discovered by some future Newton; they agitated the world as a physicist stirs the glass to mix the liquids in it, and to see them resume their places according to their specific gravity.

Sir Arthur Sidney, Sir Benedict Arundel, Count de Volmerange, Dolfos, and Daksha belonged to this powerful association; Sidney and Daksha, as members of the upper circle, had the right to select from among their brethren those whom they considered necessary for the execution of their projects. Benedict and Volmerange, who, in spite of their oath, had taken upon themselves to dispose of their own lives, had been brought back to duty in the way narrated in this story. Yet the many lives disturbed or destroyed, the manifold sacrifices of money, courage, and genius, had effected no results; the invisible player had always won.

What I have just said will suffice to give an idea of the purpose and methods of the association, — a sort of philosophical *Vehmgerichte*, which used incredible energies and vast resources to substitute in history the human will for the divine. These men, who had little religion, who believed only in power and genius, had mistaken Providence for Chance, and taking the pen from the hand of God, had attempted to write in His place upon the Book of Eternity.

Now, as is customary at the end of a story, I have merely to state the fate of the few characters which have survived the violence of the action.

Volmerange constantly sees standing before him the white form of Edith, and crouches with terror in the corner of his cell at Bedlam, withdrawing as far as he can from the spectre which his crazed imagination shows him at the other end of the room.

As for Miss Edith and Sir Benedict Arundel, some English tourists, who were going to Smyrna and visiting the Ionian islands, said they had seen at Rhodes, in a lovely marble palace built in the days of the knights, and in which were set antique fragments, a young couple whose grave and sweet serenity gave the impression that they were enjoying as much happiness as

can fall to the lot of those whose lives have been filled with grief and divers vicissitudes; although known only under the name of Mr. and Mrs. Smith, they appeared to belong to a higher class than that humble name would indicate. They neither avoided nor sought out their fellow-countrymen, but they preferred to be alone, — a plain indication that they were happy.

Sidney never re-appeared, and no news of him was ever received. Was he dead, or had he buried in some solitude his despair at having failed in the enterprise which had been the sole aim of his life for five years? That was never known. Only, some years later, a vessel returning from India, and which had been driven by a gale towards Tristan d'Acunha, landed some of its crew upon an islet in the group to catch turtles and gather sea-birds' eggs, by way of varying somewhat the salt fare on board. One of the men stumbled on the sand over a mass of small shells which had the general outline of a bottle. Delighted with his discovery, the sailor, convinced that the bottle must contain rum, cleared away the crust of earth and shells, and forcing off the lead cap, he found, instead of the liquor he hoped for, a parchment, which he handed to his captain with a fidelity he would not have exhibited had the

contents been spirits. The captain opened the parchment, folded in four, and read the following: —

"On the point of carrying out the boldest and strangest undertaking a man ever attempted, I, Sir Arthur Sidney, my mind clear and my hand firm, knowing that the waves under which I am about to plunge may swallow me up, write these lines, which perhaps will be read later, should I perish in my submarine voyage, so that my secret may not wholly die with me.

"As an Englishman I have been deeply humiliated by the shameful behaviour of England towards the great Emperor. As a respectful son I sought to wash away this stain from my mother's honour, and to spare her the shame of having murdered her guest. I made up my mind to tear this page from the history of my country, so that hereafter men should say that if England had made him a prisoner, an Englishman had delivered him and redeemed his country's word.

"I am endeavouring to prevent my country, which I love, from committing deicide, which may bring down upon it the execration of the world, as the murder of Jesus made the Jews hated over the whole world. I have sacrificed my life to that idea; for what aim can

one have greater and holier than the glory of the human family of which we are a part? To-morrow either Prometheus, taken down from his cross, shall be on board a vessel that awaits him, and which will carry him to a new empire, and to a greater destiny perhaps than that which has astonished the world, or else God will have decreed that, in what I am undertaking, I am trespassing upon the attributes of Providence.

"May 4, 1821, in sight of St. Helena."

The captain looked thoughtfully at the parchment, the writing on which had turned yellow, and read several times the letter which, after tossing about so long in its close prison, had been cast ashore upon the deserted island, and was probably the only trace left of the fate of a noble idea, a strong will, and a great courage. He then remembered having sometimes seen Sir Arthur Sidney in London and in Calcutta.

When the ship passed St. Helena the captain saluted from afar the tomb of the great man, and said to himself: —

"God did not justify Sidney, since the Emperor is sleeping under the willow, and I have that letter in my pocketbook. Sir Arthur must have been drowned. I am sorry for it, for I should willingly have shaken hands

with him, frankly and loyally, and should like to have had him seated opposite me at table in the 'Lovely Jenny's' cabin."

The "Lovely Jenny," for it was she, had been sold to a Calcutta merchant by Captain Peppercull, to whom Sidney had said that if he did not return within five days he was to dispose of the vessel as he pleased. By a singular chance it was the "Lovely Jenny" which had picked up the will of its former owner.

Now let me state what I have managed to learn concerning Daksha. After finding Priyamvada's body by that of the elephant, he buried it, carefully observing every rite; he then resumed his former austerities and invented an attitude of frightful constraint, which must have caused the greatest pleasures to the trinities, the quadrinities, and the quintinities of the Hindoo Olympus. He has not given up hopes of re-establishing the Lunar dynasty, and still looks for Volmerange. His withered fingers rub the cousa more feverishly than ever, and his black lips murmur with delirious piety the ineffable monosyllable which contains everything — and other things besides.

In pursuance of the idea which occurred to him during the fight, he no longer suspends himself by three

hooks in the muscles of his back, but with five; thanks to this ingenious penance, he is convinced that the English will be driven from India, and that he will obtain of Heaven the favour of dying while holding on to a cow's tail, a belief which does not prevent his being a very deep philosopher, an impenetrable diplomat, a remarkable politician, or his secretly causing revolts in the provinces, and weaving endless deep intrigues, while he remains seated on his gazelle skin between four braziers, and gives a great deal of trouble to the Honourable East India Company.

The Mummy's Foot

THE MUMMY'S FOOT

HAVING nothing particular to do, I had entered the shop of one of those dealers in curiosities called bric-à-brac dealers in our Parisian slang, which is utterly unintelligible in other parts of France. No doubt you have sometimes glanced at the windows of some of these shops, which have multiplied since it has become fashionable to purchase old furniture, and every stock-broker thinks he must have a mediæval room. They have at one and the same time something of the junk-dealer, the upholsterer, the alchemist's laboratory, and the painter's studio. In these mysterious dens, through which a prudent half-light filters, what is most genuinely old is the dirt. The cobwebs there are more authentic than the lace, and old pear-tree wood is younger than mahogany imported last week from America.

The shop of my bric-à-brac dealer was a regular lumber-room; every age and every country appeared to be represented in it. A red clay Etruscan lamp rested upon a cabinet by Boule, with ebony panels austerely inlaid with brass; a half-lounge of the days of Louis

XV carelessly extended its fawn feet under a thick Louis XIII table, with heavy oaken spirals and carved foliage and monsters. In one corner gleamed the wavy breastplate of a damascened suit of Milan armour. Parian porcelain cupids and nymphs, Chinese grotesques, vases of céladon and craquelé, cups of Dresden and old Sèvres china, covered the shelves and filled up the corners. On the denticulated shelves of the sideboards shone resplendently great Japanese dishes with red and blue ornaments, set off by gold hatchings, side by side with enamels by Bernard Palissy, representing adders, frogs, and lizards in relief. From wardrobes that burst open escaped cascades of silk damask, overlaid with silver, waves of brocatelle, which a sunbeam covered with luminous dots; while portraits of every period in more or less dull gold frames smiled through their yellow varnish.

The dealer carefully followed me along the narrow passage left open between the piles of furniture, keeping down the fluttering skirts of my coat, and watching my elbows, with the restless attention of an antiquarian and a usurer.

He had a curious face, that dealer; a big skull, polished like marble, with a thin aureole of white hair,

brought out more strongly by the pale salmon colour of his skin, giving him a sham look of patriarchal kindness, which was neutralised, however, by the sparkling of two little yellow eyes that shone in their orbs like two gold coins laid on mercury. The aquiline profile of his nose recalled the Oriental or Jewish type; his thin, slender hands, covered with veins and full of nerves standing out like the strings of a violin, and provided with nails like the claws at the end of a bat's wings, had a most unpleasant senile trembling; but when they lifted some precious object, an onyx cup, a Venetian glass, or a tray of Bohemian crystal, these trembling hands became stronger than steel pincers or lobster's claws. The old rascal had such a thoroughly rabbinical and cabalistic look that he would have burned at the stake three centuries ago merely on account of his appearance.

"Are you not going to buy anything to-day, sir? Here is a Malay creese, the blade of which is waved like a flame. Look at the grooves for the blood to run down; and at these teeth cut the reverse way to tear the entrails as you pull out the weapon. It is a ferocious arm, very characteristic, which would look uncommonly well on your wall. This two-handed sword

is very handsome. It is by Joseph de la Hera. And this great duelling-sword with open-work pearl handle is a superb piece of work."

"No, I have enough weapons and instruments of destruction. I want a statuette, a trifle, for a paper-weight, for I cannot bear those cheap bronzes sold by stationers, which are to be found on every writing-table."

The old gnome, rummaging among his possessions, spread out before me antique bronzes, — or at least claimed to be antique — pieces of malachite, small Hindoo or Chinese jade idols, grotesque incarnations of Brahma or Vishnu, uncommonly well fitted to the not very divine purpose of keeping down newspapers and letters.

I was hesitating between a porcelain dragon covered with warts, its mouth adorned with fangs and tentacles, and a small abominable Mexican fetish representing the god Witziliputzili, when I noticed a lovely foot, which at first I thought must be a fragment of some antique Venus. It had the lovely tawny, ruddy tints that give to Florentine bronze its warm and living tints so preferable to the verdigrised tone of ordinary bronzes, which might easily be mistaken for statues in a state of

putrefaction. Satiny gleams shimmered over its round forms, polished by the loving kisses of twenty centuries; for it unquestionably was of Corinthian brass, a piece of work of the best epoch, perhaps a casting by Lysippus.

"This foot will do for me," said I to the dealer, who looked at me with a sly, ironical glance, as he held it out to allow me to examine it more comfortably.

I was surprised at its lightness. It was not a foot of metal, but of flesh; an embalmed foot, a mummy's foot. On looking closely the grain of the skin and the almost imperceptible mark made by the bandages could be perceived. The toes were small and delicate, with perfect, pure nails, transparent as agate; the great toe, somewhat apart, after the fashion of antiquity, contrasted happily with the direction of the other toes, and gave it a free attitude, the neat aspect of a bird's foot. The sole, scarcely marked by a few faint lines, had evidently never come in contact with the ground, and had trodden only upon the finest matting of Nile reeds, and the softest carpets of panther's-skins.

"Ha! ha! you want the foot of the Princess Hermonthis," said the dealer, with a horrible chuckle, as he fixed upon me his owl-like glance. "Ha! ha! —

for a paper-weight! That is a novel idea; that is an artist's idea. If old Pharaoh had been told that his adored daughter's foot would be used as a paper-weight he would have been astounded, considering that he was having a mountain of granite hollowed out in order to put inside the triple painted and gilded coffin, covered with hieroglyphs, with beautiful paintings representing the judgment of the soul," added the queer little dealer, in a low voice, as if speaking to himself.

"How much will you sell me this fragment of a mummy for?"

"As dear as I can, for it is quite a curiosity. If I had the companion to it, I would not let you have the pair for less than five hundred francs. Pharaoh's daughters are scarce, very scarce."

"I know it; I am aware that it is not very common; but how much do you want? To begin with, I must inform you that my whole wealth amounts to five louis. I shall buy whatever may cost five louis, but nothing more. You might search the back pockets of my vests, and my most secret drawers, you would not find another sou in them."

"Five louis for the foot of Princess Hermonthis! That is very little, very little indeed for an authentic

foot," said the dealer, wagging his head and rolling his eyes. "Well, take it. I will give you the wrapper into the bargain," he added, as he rolled the foot in an old piece of damask. "It is very beautiful genuine Indian damask; never has been dyed; it is strong and sound," he muttered, as he rubbed with his fingers the worn tissue; the force of commercial habit making him praise an object of so little value that even he thought it might as well be given away.

He slipped the gold pieces into a sort of mediæval purse hanging from his belt, repeating, "The foot of Princess Hermonthis for a paper-weight!"

Then, fixing on me his flaming eyes, he said, in a voice as strident as the mewing of a cat that has just swallowed a fish-bone: "Old Pharaoh will not be very pleased; he was very fond of his daughter, the worthy man."

"You talk about him as if you were his contemporary. Old though you are, you do not quite go back to the Pyramids of Egypt," I replied laughingly, as I passed out of the shop.

I returned home, very well satisfied with my purchase, and in order to turn it to account at once, I placed the foot of the divine Princess Hermonthis upon a bundle

of papers, drafts of verses, an undecipherable mosaic of corrections, beginnings of articles, forgotten letters which I had posted in the drawer, — a mistake often committed by absent-minded people. The effect the foot produced was charming, eccentric, and romantic.

Greatly pleased with this embellishment of my table, I went out into the street and walked along with the gravity and the pride that become a man who has over every passer-by he elbows the ineffable advantage of possessing a portion of the Princess Hermonthis, daughter of the Pharaoh. I considered as beneath contempt all those who did not possess, as I did, so notoriously Egyptian a paper-weight, and it appeared to me that the proper business in the life of a sensible man was to have a mummy's foot on his writing-table. Happily, I met some friends, who drew me out of my infatuation. I went to dinner with them, for it would have been difficult for me to dine with myself.

When I returned at night, my head filled with a light, pearly-gray vapour, a faint puff of oriental perfume tickled my olfactory nerves. The warmth of the room had warmed up the natron, bitumen, and myrrh in which the embalmers had dipped the princess's body. It was a sweet and penetrating perfume that had not wholly

evaporated during the lapse of four thousand years; for Egypt dreamed of eternity: its odours have the solidity of granite and last as long.

I soon drank deep of the black cup of sleep. For an hour or two everything remained a blank, and I sank in the sombre waves of forgetfulness and nothingness. Then my intellectual darkness lightened, and dreams began to flutter silently around. The eyes of my soul were opened, and I saw my room such as it actually was. I might have thought myself awake. A strange feeling convinced me that I was asleep and that something curious was about to happen.

The odour of myrrh had grown stronger, and I felt a slight headache, which I very naturally attributed to a number of glasses of champagne which we had drunk to the unknown gods and our future success. I looked round the room with a feeling of expectation that nothing justified. The furniture was in its place, the lamp burning on the table, pleasantly softened by the milky whiteness of the ground-glass globe; the water-colours shimmered under their Bohemian glass; the curtains hung languidly; everything looked serene and quiet.

But after a few moments this peaceful interior seemed to be disturbed. The wood-work cracked furtively, the

log buried in the ashes suddenly shot out a jet of blue flame, and the disks of the coat-hooks looked like metal eyes, attentively watching, as I was, for whatever was about to happen.

By chance I glanced at the table on which I had placed the foot of the Princess Hermonthis. Instead of resting quietly as became a foot embalmed for more than four thousand years, it was moving, contracting, and hopping about the papers like a frightened frog. I could have sworn it was in contact with a voltaic battery. I could quite distinctly hear the sharp sound made by its little heel, as hard as a gazelle's hoof.

I was not quite satisfied with my purchase, for I prefer sedentary paper-weights, and it does not seem natural to me to see feet going about without limbs. Indeed, I began to experience something not unlike fear.

Suddenly I saw a fold of one of my curtains move, and I heard a sound like that made by a person hopping round on one foot. I must confess I turned cold and hot alternately; a strange chill ran up and down my back, and my hair stood up on my head.

The curtains opened, and I saw coming forward the strangest figure imaginable. It was that of a young girl

of a very dark coffee-colour, like Amani the bayadere, of perfect beauty, and recalling the purest Egyptian type. Her almond-shaped eyes were turned up at the corners, and her eyebrows were so black that they showed blue. Her nose was delicately shaped, almost Greek in its outline, and she might have been taken for a Corinthian bronze statue, but that the prominence of the cheek-bones and the somewhat African size of the mouth showed plainly that she belonged to the hieroglyphic race of the banks of the Nile. Her well-shaped arms, slender like those of very young girls, were clasped by metal and glass bracelets; her hair was plaited into little tresses; and on her bosom hung an idol of green clay, which I recognised by the seven-tailed whip as Isis, the conductress of souls; on her brow shone a plate of gold, and some traces of rouge were visible on her copper-coloured cheeks.

As for her costume, it was strange indeed. Imagine a loin cloth of narrow bands covered with black and red hieroglyphics, stiff with bitumen, which seemed to belong to a recently unrolled mummy.

By one of those sudden changes of thought which are so frequent in dreams, I heard the shrill, hoarse voice of the bric-à-brac dealer repeating like a monotonous

refrain the remark he had made in his shop in so enigmatic a tone: —

"Old Pharaoh will not be very much pleased. He was very fond of his daughter, the worthy man."

There was one curious peculiarity which did not contribute to reassure me, — the apparition had but one foot. The other leg was broken off at the ankle.

She went to the table, where the mummy's foot was jumping and quivering with greater rapidity. On reaching it, she leaned upon the edge, and I saw a tear grow in her eyes. Though she said not a word, I could clearly make out her thoughts. She looked at the foot, for it was hers, with an infinitely graceful expression of coquettish sadness, while the foot ran and leaped hither and thither as if moved by steel springs.

Twice or thrice she stretched out her hand to seize it, but failed to do so.

Then there took place between the Princess Hermonthis and her foot, which appeared endowed with a life of its own, a very curious dialogue, in a very ancient Coptic dialect, such as was spoken some thirty centuries ago in the mummy pits of the country of Ser. Luckily that night I happened to know Coptic perfectly well.

Princess Hermonthis said in a sweet voice that vibrated like a crystal bell: —

"Well, my dear little foot, so you are still fleeing from me, though I took good care of you. I washed you with scented water in an alabaster basin; I polished your heel with pumice-stone dipped in palm oil; I cut your nails with golden scissors, and polished them with hippopotamus-teeth; I took care to choose for you painted and embroidered sandals with turned-up points, that made every Egyptian girl envy us. I put on your toes rings representing the sacred scarabæus, and you supported one of the daintiest bodies that a lazy foot could wish for."

The foot replied in a sulky tone: —

"You know very well I do not belong to myself any more. I have been purchased and paid for. The old dealer knew what he was doing. He is still angry with you for refusing to marry him. It is a trick that he is playing upon you. The Arab that broke open your royal coffin in the subterranean well of the Theban Necropolis had been sent by him. He meant to prevent your going to the meeting of the people in darkness in the lower cities. Have you got five gold pieces to buy me back with?"

"Alas, I have not. My gems, my rings, my purses of gold and silver, everything has been stolen from me," replied Princess Hermonthis, with a sigh.

"Princess," I cried then, "I have never unjustly kept back any one's foot. Although you have not got the five louis which I paid for it, I return it to you most willingly. I should be uncommonly sorry to cripple so lovely a person as Princess Hermonthis."

The beautiful Egyptian must have been surprised at the Regency manner and the troubadour tone in which I spoke this speech. She cast upon me a glance full of gratitude, and her eyes lighted up with blue flashes. She took her foot, which allowed itself to be caught this time, like a woman about to put on a shoe, and fitted it very skilfully to her leg, after which she took two or three steps through the room, as if to make certain that she was really no longer a cripple.

"How glad my father will be, for he was so troubled by the mutilation I suffered. The very day I was born he had set a whole nation to work to dig me a tomb deep enough to preserve me intact until the great day when souls are to be weighed in the balances of Amenthi. Come with me to him. He will welcome you, for you have restored my foot to me."

The proposal struck me as quite natural. I put on a dressing-gown with a great flowered pattern, in which I looked most Pharaoh-like, hastily slipped my feet into a pair of Turkish slippers, and told Princess Hermonthis that I was ready to follow her.

Before leaving, she took from her neck the little figure in green china, and placed it upon the scattered papers that covered my table.

"It is only right," she said, "that I should give you something in place of your paper-weight."

She held out her hand to me. It was soft and cold as a serpent's skin. We were off.

We sped for some time as swift as an arrow through a grayish fluid air in which faintly outlined forms passed to right and left. At one time nothing was visible but sky and water. Presently obelisks began to show up; pylons and long stairs, with sphinxes ranged all the way down, stood out against the horizon. We had arrived.

The princess led me to a mountain of rose granite, in which there was a low, narrow opening which it would have been difficult to distinguish from the cracks in the stone had not a couple of stelæ covered with carvings made it recognisable.

Hermonthis lighted a torch and walked on before me.

We entered corridors cut in the living rock; the walls, covered with panels of hieroglyphs and allegorical processions, must have occupied thousands of men for thousands of years. These corridors, interminably long, ended in square halls, in the centre of which were dug wells. We descended these by means of cramp-irons or of spiral staircases. The wells led into other chambers from which issued other corridors, also adorned with hawks, serpents biting their tails, representations of the mystic tau, pedum, and bari, — a prodigious piece of work which no living eye was to see, endless legends in granite which the dead alone had time to read during eternity.

At last we entered so vast, so enormous, so immense a hall that its limits were invisible. As far as I could see stretched rows of monstrous pillars, between which gleamed limpid stars of yellow light. These brilliant points indicated incalculable depths.

Princess Hermonthis still held my hand, and bowed graciously to the mummies of her acquaintance.

My eyes becoming accustomed to the twilight, I began to discern objects. I saw seated upon thrones the kings of subterranean races. They were tall, dry

old men, wrinkled, parchment-like, black with naphtha and bitumen, wearing the golden pschent, pectorals, and neckplates covered with gems, their eyes staring like those of sphinxes, and they wore long beards, whitened with the snow of centuries. Behind them stood their embalmed peoples, in the stiff, constrained attitudes of Egyptian art, preserving forever the pose prescribed by the hieratic code; behind the peoples, the cats, ibises, and crocodiles of those days, made more mysterious still by being swathed up in bands, mewed, flapped their wings, and chuckled.

Every Pharaoh was there, Cheops, Chephrenes, Psammetichus, Sesostris, Amenoteph; all the swarthy lords of pyramids and pits. On a higher throne sat King Chronos, Xixouthros, who lived in the days of the deluge, and Tubal Cain, who preceded him.

King Xixouthros's beard had grown so much that it had already circled seven times the granite table on which he leaned, dreamy and sleepy.

Farther away, through a dusty vapour, through the mist of eternities, I managed to make out the seventy-two pre-Adamite kings, with their seventy-two peoples, vanished forever.

Princess Hermonthis, having allowed me to enjoy this marvellous spectacle for a few moments, presented me to the Pharaoh, her father, who nodded to me most majestically.

"I have found my foot, I have found my foot!" cried the Princess, clapping her little hands together, with every mark of mad joy. "It is this gentleman who gave it back to me."

The races of Keme, of Nahasi, all the black, bronze, and copper-coloured nations, repeated together: —

"The Princess Hermonthis has found her foot again."

Xixouthros himself was interested. He raised his heavy lids, stroked his moustache, and let fall upon me his glance, laden with centuries.

"By Oms, the dog of Hades, and Tmei, daughter of the Sun and of Truth, you are a fine and worthy fellow," said the Pharaoh, extending towards me his sceptre, ending in a lotus flower. "What will you have for a reward?"

Bold as one is in dreams, in which nothing seems impossible, I asked for the hand of Hermonthis. It struck me that to get the hand in return for the foot was an antithetical reward in pretty good taste.

The Pharaoh opened wide his glass eyes, amazed at my joke and my request.

"What is your country, and what is your age?"

"I am a Frenchman, and I am twenty-seven years old, venerable Pharaoh."

"Twenty-seven years! and he proposes to wed Princess Hermonthis, who is thirty centuries old," cried out together all the thrones and all the circles of nations.

Hermonthis alone did not think my request at all improper.

"If you were only two thousand years old," answered the old king, "I would willingly give you the Princess; but the disproportion is too great; and then, we must have for our daughters husbands that can last. You people do not know how to preserve yourselves. The last, brought here scarcely fifteen centuries ago, are now nothing but a handful of ashes. See, my own flesh is hard as basalt, my bones are like bars of steel. I shall see the last day of the world with the same body and the same face as I had when alive. My daughter Hermonthis will endure longer than a bronze statue. By that time the wind will have scattered the last grain of your dust, and Isis herself, who managed to find the

pieces of Osiris, would be hard put to it to reconstruct your frame. See how vigorous I am yet, and how strong my arms are," said he, as he shook hands with me in English fashion, so that he cut my fingers with my rings.

He squeezed my hand so hard that I awoke, and perceived my friend Alfred, pulling me by the arm, and shaking me to make me get up.

"Look here, you confounded sleeper, shall I have to take you out into the street and to set off fireworks at your ears? It is past noon. Have you forgotten that you promised to call for me to go to see Aguado's Spanish paintings?"

"Good gracious, I had forgotten all about it," replied I, as I dressed. "We shall go at once. I have the invitation here on my table."

As I spoke, I stepped forward to take up the card; but judge of my astonishment when, instead of the mummy's foot which I had bought the night before, I saw the little figure of green clay put in its place by the Princess Hermonthis.

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